

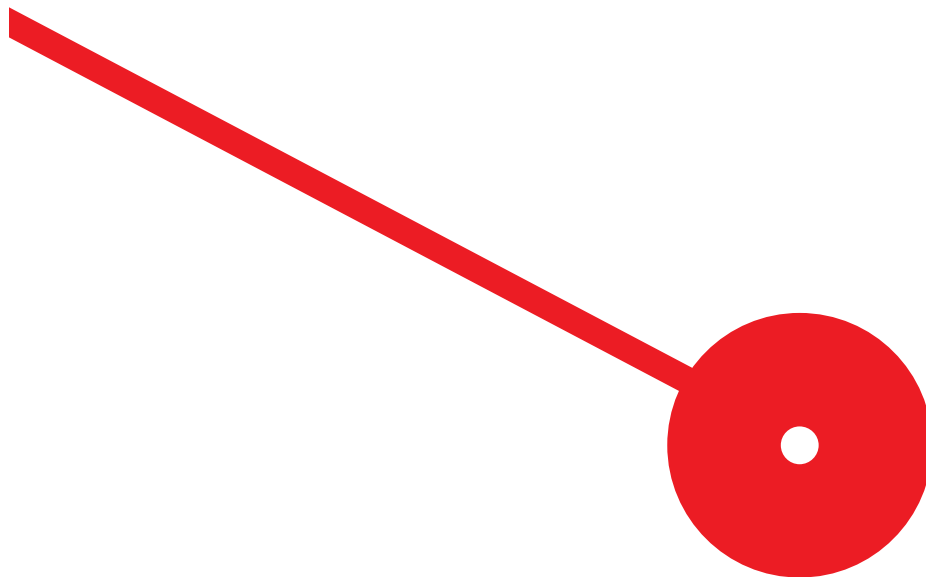


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Clara Marinho

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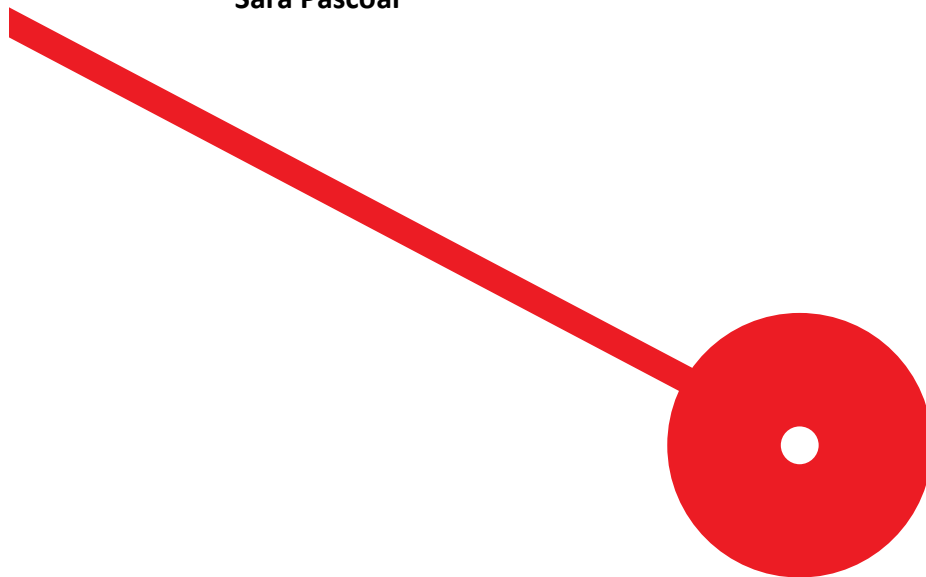




The use of social media in intercultural contexts: the case of ISCAP mobility students

Clara Marinho

Dissertação de Mestrado apresentado ao Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto para a obtenção do grau de Mestre em Estudos Interculturais para Negócios, sob orientação de Sara Pascoal



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Abstract:

This thesis examines the use of social media in intercultural contexts, namely the Erasmus mobility program - a renowned European student exchange initiative- focusing on the case of ISCAP. The study explores how social media platforms serve as transformative mediums for fostering intercultural understanding and exchange among Erasmus participants. Drawing upon qualitative research methodologies, including interviews and an online survey, the research investigates the experiences of participants in utilizing social media for intercultural communication and engagement. The findings highlight the multifaceted roles of social media in facilitating the exploration and celebration of diverse cultures, breaking down geographical barriers, and fostering meaningful connections among individuals from various backgrounds. The study contributes to the existing literature by shedding light on the potential of social media as a catalyst for interculturalism during the Erasmus experience, offering insights and recommendations for leveraging social media effectively in intercultural contexts.

Key words: Social media; Interculturalism; Erasmus; ISCAP

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List of Abbreviations

ISCAP- Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Assessoria do Porto

IC- Intercultural

MC- Multicultural

SNS – Social networking site

FOMO- Fear of missing out

INTRODUCTION

The Erasmus program, a renowned European student exchange initiative, has long been celebrated for its ability to foster intercultural understanding and appreciation among participants. (European Commission, 2022) With the rapid growth and widespread adoption of social media, the landscape of intercultural communication has experienced a significant shift. Social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools that enable individuals to connect, engage, and exchange information across cultures, transcending geographical boundaries (European Commission, 2022).

This thesis aims to explore the use of social media in intercultural contexts during Erasmus mobility programmes, examining how these platforms contribute to facilitating intercultural communication and understanding.

In recent years, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube have become integral parts of individuals' lives, offering spaces for self-expression, connection, and sharing experiences. TikTok, a social media platform popular among young bloggers in the virtual realm, is especially relevant for this purpose. Users are attracted to accounts with a large subscriber base, leading to opportunities for advice and collaborations. This serves as a cornerstone for potential partnerships and an easy way to connect with others' experiences on TikTok. (Cruz, 2022) Not only TikTok, but these platforms mentioned before have evolved into virtual communities, where people from diverse cultural backgrounds can come together, interact, and engage in cross-cultural conversations. (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016) The utilization of social media in intercultural contexts during Erasmus has the potential to enhance the overall experience of participants, enabling them to forge meaningful connections, learn about different cultures, and challenge stereotypes.

Several studies have explored the impact of social media on intercultural communication, shedding light on its potential to bridge cultural gaps and foster understanding. For instance, Kapidzic and Herring (2015) found that social media platforms provide opportunities for individuals to learn about diverse cultures, engage in intercultural dialogue, and develop cultural competence. These studies, among others,

provide a theoretical foundation for examining the use of social media in intercultural contexts during Erasmus.

The Erasmus program itself presents a unique context for studying the use of social media in intercultural settings. Erasmus participants are exposed to new cultural environments, offering them opportunities to interact with people from diverse backgrounds. Social media platforms provide an additional dimension to this intercultural experience, as participants can use these tools to connect with locals, fellow students, and individuals from their home countries. Moreover, the integration of social media into the Erasmus experience can lead to the formation of online communities that provide support, guidance, and a platform for cultural exchange among participants. (European Commission, 2022).

Object of the research

Social media plays a significant role in our lives since it encourages our global community's connection and interconnectedness across cultures, it gives users the chance to interact with others and be a part of various networks through online virtual communities. In addition to communicating with others online, users use social media to educate themselves and discover many points of view on problems, subjects, and events. However, most notably, social media is used for socialising, and it is a type of media that enables users to engage in online discussions and interactions without actually meeting other people face-to-face. (Sawyer, & Chen 2012) In addition, people utilise social media throughout intercultural adaptation to a guest country's environment to learn about their hosts, build and develop relationships, and keep up with events in their own countries. To better comprehend the impact that social media plays in the process of intercultural communication in this globalising world, it is crucial to evaluate the potential effects of social media on intercultural adaptation.

Problem Statement

In what way does social media help with intercultural adaptation among foreign students

Objectives

- Understanding social media
- Exploring the various types of studying abroad programs

- Understanding the usage and benefits of social media for intercultural adaptation

Methodology

This thesis adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining a literature review, a survey, and interviews to comprehensively investigate the use of social media in intercultural contexts during the Erasmus program. The combination of these methods allows for a rich exploration of the research topic, encompassing both existing knowledge and the experiences of Erasmus participants. The study begins with a literature review to establish a theoretical foundation and gain insights into the existing research on social media and intercultural communication. The review will encompass relevant academic articles, books, and other scholarly sources to examine the key concepts, theories, and findings related to the use of social media in intercultural contexts.

A survey will be developed to gather quantitative data on the experiences, perceptions, and usage patterns of Erasmus participants regarding social media in intercultural contexts. The survey will be distributed to a sample of Erasmus participants related to ISCAP, ensuring a diverse representation of individuals from distinct cultural backgrounds. The survey questions will cover aspects such as social media platforms used, frequency and purpose of use. The survey data will be analysed to identify trends, patterns, and correlations.

Lastly, interviews will be conducted with a subset of Erasmus participants to provide a deeper understanding of their experiences with social media in intercultural contexts. The interviews will be designed to elicit rich qualitative data, allowing participants to share their personal perspectives, insights, and narratives. The interview questions will cover topics such as the role of social media in intercultural interactions, challenges faced, perceived impact on cultural understanding, and suggestions for enhancing the use of social media in intercultural contexts.

The data collected from the survey and interviews will be examined using thematic analysis. The qualitative data from the interviews will be analysed by identifying recurring themes and patterns in the participants' responses. The quantitative data from the survey will be studied using appropriate statistical methods to identify significant relationships, trends, and correlations among the variables. The findings from

both the qualitative and quantitative analyses will be synthesized to provide a comprehensive understanding of the use of social media in intercultural contexts during the Erasmus program.

By combining a literature review, survey, and interviews, this mixed-methods approach ensures a comprehensive exploration of the research topic, encompassing both the broader context and the individual experiences of Erasmus participants. The integration of qualitative and quantitative data provides a robust and nuanced understanding of the use of social media in intercultural contexts during Erasmus.

This thesis focused on an in-depth study to try and understand the complex dynamics of social media usage among mobility students. A thorough literature review was the initial stage and provided the framework for the research. This review aimed to outline the several mobility programmes that students might participate in, describe and contextualise the essence of social media, and establish an understanding of interculturalism. The second chapter then presents the results of a thorough study of survey data regarding the usage of social media by ISCAP mobility students, providing insight into their choices, routines, and experiences. The third chapter went into greater detail about this investigation by using student interviews from ISCAP to learn considerable information about their individual experiences using social media during mobility. In the last chapter, all of these carefully gathered and examined data will come together to offer a definitive answer to the main thesis issue.

Introduction

Social media has become an integral part of our modern society, impacting various aspects of our lives. However, defining and understanding social media is a complex task, as highlighted by Caleb T. Carr and Rebecca A. Hayes (2015). The studies on social media lack a consensus on its definition and characteristics, leading to diverse interpretations across different disciplines.

Scholars from various fields have proposed definitions for social media, emphasizing user-generated content, digital interactions, and online communication. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as Internet-based applications enabling the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Russo et al. (2008) describe social media as platforms that promote online communication, networking, and cooperation. However, these definitions fail to capture the unique technological and social affordances of social media.

Howard and Parks (2012) propose a more comprehensive definition that includes three elements: (1) information infrastructure and technologies, (2) digital content, and the individuals, groups, (3) and businesses involved. They argue that social media should be understood beyond specific tools or applications, considering its broader social implications.

In Carr and Hayes' 2015 work (p.49), they differentiate social media from other types of media tools by identifying shared attributes and qualities. They characterize it underscoring the interactive aspect of social media, the active involvement of users in content generation, and the significance placed on social interaction.

The evolution of social media can be traced back to the late 1990s when platforms like SixDegrees.com, AsianAvenue, and LiveJournal emerged (Boyd & Ellison, 2007b). These platforms laid the foundation for subsequent social networking sites like Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook, which gained popularity by offering unique features and attracting diverse user populations.

The impact of social media on our culture, businesses, and global interconnectedness is undeniable. It has transformed communication by breaking down

barriers, enabling decentralized channels, and facilitating democratic discourse. Social media also serves as a powerful marketing tool for businesses, allowing them to reach a vast audience and promote their brands effectively (Amedie, 2015). Moreover, social media plays a crucial role in fostering connections, satisfying the need for belonging, and creating virtual communities (Sawyer & Chen, 2011). It has changed societal dynamics, facilitating education, knowledge sharing, and access to information across geographical boundaries (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016).

While social media offers numerous benefits, it also presents challenges and potential negative effects, such as information overload and privacy concerns. However, the overall impact of social media on our society remains significant and multifaceted.

In addition to exploring the impact of social media, this literature review will also examine the concept of interculturalism. Interculturalism, rooted in diverse geographical and contextual factors, promotes dialogue, interaction, and understanding among individuals and cultural communities. It has gained attention in various regions, such as Quebec in Canada and post-colonial Latin America, to safeguard national identity and foster diversity (Elias & Mansouri, 2020).

The concept of interculturalism has attracted significant interdisciplinary research, particularly in fields like international relations, migration studies, and education. The study of intercultural communication plays a crucial role in understanding the dynamics of cultural diversity and the challenges it presents (Piller, 2012).

Overall, this literature review aims to analyse the impact of social media on society and explore the concept of interculturalism within this context. By examining the scholarly discourse on these topics, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and implications of social media in our interconnected world.

Social Media

To first understand social media and its impact, we must analyse it and find a way to explain it. However, as Caleb T.Carr and Rebecca A. Hayes said, “Scholarship of social media is similarly convoluted, as there tends to be a general consensus of what tools may be considered social media but without a consensus on what defines these tools as social media, especially across disciplines” (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p. 46) meaning that

even though society knows what social media is, it is not an easy task to define it and explain it.

Nevertheless, since the creation and study of social media, various scholars have offered several definitions coming from various fields. Some definitions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Terry, 2009) typically place an emphasis on user-generated content or interaction in digital technology but, some definitions concentrate on the creation of messages and online interactions: still, they fall short of capturing the distinctive characteristics of social media. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as Internet-based applications that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content, while Russo et al. (2008) define it as promoting online communication, networking, and cooperation. These criteria, however, can be used to describe other communication technologies that do not have social media's unique technological and social affordances.

As proposed by Howard and Parks (2012), a more thorough definition has three elements: the information infrastructure and technologies, the digital content, and the individuals, groups, and businesses involved in creating and consuming that material. They acknowledge that social media are frequently associated with applications, but that this tool-centric approach ignores the real and potential social implications and limits contributions to theory development. Public relations and medical definitions emphasise social media's interactive features and user-generated content, although they do not explicitly rule out other "new media" platforms like email and text messaging. Social media is frequently linked to tools or device features that are thought to be synonymous with Web 2.0 or the collaborative web. However, Boyd and Ellison's (2007) definition of social media as social network sites have resulted in imprecision in the literature, impeding the creation of a more comprehensive theoretical framework for social media.

Nonetheless, T. Carr and Hayes (2015) distinguish social media as a unique subset of media tools that share a common set of traits and characteristics, rather than focusing on a medium that can be used for socioemotional communication. The affordances for diverse individuals and groups to add to the creation of the content they are consuming provide an inherent worth far greater than what each individual site feature offers. As a result, they formally characterise social media as "Internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of masspersonal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content." (p. 49)

which explains that social media are Internet-based channels that enable individuals to engage in opportunistic interactions and selective self-presentation with both large and niche audiences who value user-generated content and the impression of social engagement (Carr & Hayes, 2015).

SixDegrees.com, the first well-known social networking platform, went live in 1997. Users could make profiles, add friends, and look through friends lists. SixDegrees was the first website to combine several elements, even if they were present on other websites before it. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007b) SixDegrees, however, was unable to maintain its operation and shut down in 2000. Other community tools with buddy and profile capabilities appeared between 1997 and 2001, including AsianAvenue, BlackPlanet, MiGente, LiveJournal, Cyworld, and LunarStorm. Beginning with Ryze.com in 2001, the subsequent wave of social networking sites focused on utilising corporate networks. Friendster, LinkedIn, Tribe.net, and Ryze were all integrated. Only LinkedIn and Friendster (which was particularly well-liked among bloggers, Burning Man festival attendees, and gay men) were successful. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007b) Due to its quick expansion, cultural conflicts, and the removal of fraudulent profiles, Friendster had both technological and social difficulties. Friendsters' popularity increased in the Philippines and other nations despite dropping in the United States.

When MySpace was created in 2003, it drew indie rock musicians and former Friendster users. By letting users customise their pages and reacting to user requests, it sets itself apart. Many teens joined, and MySpace created a diverse population of musicians/artists, teens, and post-college urban social masses. MySpace was acquired by News Corporation in 2005, which attracted media attention but also raised security issues. Other SNSs, such as Friendster in the Pacific Islands, Orkut in Brazil and India, Mixi in Japan, and LunarStorm in Sweden, were being forgotten while MySpace was gaining popularity (Boyd & Ellison, 2007b).

Facebook, one of the most popular social media ever, started as being only accessible to Harvard students. However, it soon spread to other colleges, high school students, working adults, and eventually everyone. Facebook stands apart due to its emphasis on closed networks and its application features. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007) This, in turn, coined the term "Social Media," and contributed to the prominence it has today. The most recent addition to this glamorous grouping has been so-called "virtual worlds":

computer-based simulated environments inhabited by three-dimensional avatars (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009).

Social media unquestionably has a significant impact on our culture, business, and entire worldview in the modern world. Social media is a brand-new platform that allows users to connect, relate to, and mobilise for a cause as well as exchange ideas, ask for help, and give direction. Social media has broken down communication barriers, created decentralised channels for communication, and allowed everyone to participate in democratic discourse, even those living in authoritarian nations.

The ability to create a group on social media allows like-minded individuals to collaborate. Students who use social networking sites perform considerably better academically, partly because they can collaborate on projects outside of the classroom and interact with each other for help on homework. Social media is a powerful marketing tool as well. Companies use social media as a medium for product marketing through advertising because of the network's exponential user growth, where they promote brands, highlight features, and raise awareness (Amedie, 2015).

Social media plays a significant role in our lives since it encourages our global community's connection and interconnectedness across cultures. People can communicate and interact with information that can be found easily on the Internet thanks to media for social interaction. Social media is now increasingly prevalent in daily routines and patterns due to the rising number of online users in today's society. There are distinct reasons why people utilise social media. The urge for engagement and connection with others is first and foremost obvious. (Sawyer & Chen, 2011) People seek to satisfy their need for a sense of belonging through support through interactions with others, as suggested by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954). People work to satisfy their physiological and safety needs before attempting to satisfy Maslow's third need, belonging. Social media gives users the chance to interact with others and be a part of various networks through online virtual communities (Sawyer & Chen, 2011).

Social media also alters a society's way of life. The benefits of social media are numerous, starting with connectivity. It enables people to communicate with each other and exchange ideas from anywhere, no matter where they are or what religion they practise. Social media's attractiveness resides in its capacity to encourage education and interaction with others. (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016)

Social networking also offers the benefit of education, which is advantageous to pupils as well as educators. It provides a simple approach to getting knowledge and insight from experts in numerous industries. Social media makes it possible to educate oneself without financial restrictions, despite one's location or level of education. Social networking sites can be used as a platform for asking for assistance and support. You can ask your linked network for help, whether it's guidance or cash aid. The ability to be up to date about the current events taking place across the world is one of the main benefits of social media. Social media offers a more varied and quicker source of information compared to traditional media, which can be prejudiced or insufficient. (Akram & Kumar, 2017)

In addition to the advantages already discussed, social media also allows businesses to advertise and spread their message to a large audience. Businesses may reach a worldwide market, increase earnings, and successfully accomplish their business goals by utilising social media platforms.

Social media may also be a potent instrument for supporting just causes. Social media platforms are being used by people to donate to and help those in need, offering a quick and effective approach to assist those who need it. Social media also supports the development of communities. Social media enables people from many communities to interact, participate in discussions, and share pertinent information and resources in our multireligious society. Based on their common interests and histories, it serves as a virtual setting where people may interact and share ideas and experiences. (Akram & Kumar, 2017)

One of the important aspects mentioned is the use of social media for education. Academic integration has been noted as a crucial issue for the acculturation of modern college-age adolescents, emphasising the impact of universities on students' good learning outcomes in higher education. Despite all the cultural, social, and contextual changes they experience while studying abroad, international students' top priority is to earn a higher degree with distinction at their host schools. (Pang, 2020) Sojourners use the internet and online social networking primarily to attend online courses, form significant relationships, share valuable resources, and look up information about extracurricular pursuits. They rely less on traditional media, such as television and newspapers, to adjust their learning career (Park et al., 2014).

New media, particularly social media platforms like Facebook, blogs, MySpace, YouTube, Twitter, and the iPhone, have empowered individuals worldwide to represent themselves and connect in cyberspace. Since international students of today were among the first native internet users, social media serve as the primary means of contact and information sharing with a variety of groups regularly in both personal and professional contexts. (Chen, 2012) The way information is shared through new media significantly influences the development of intercultural relationships in virtual communities, as noted by Boyd & Ellison (2007). Elola and Oskoz (2009) found that blogging positively impacts intercultural relationships and enhances participants' intercultural communication competence, particularly in foreign language and study-abroad contexts. However, new media can have negative effects on intercultural communication. Excessive personal information in blogs, especially negative content about friends, employers, and others, can hinder the establishment of constructive intra- and intercultural relationships. (Chen, 2012)

Interculturalism

The intercultural approach is not entirely original. In fact, it predates the current conversation about diversity management because the notion of "interculturality" was conceived long before the European version, which has gotten the majority of attention in Western studies, roughly ten years ago. (Zapata-Barrero 2017). Different geographical and contextual factors influence the intercultural approach and intercultural dialogue and interaction on a micro level between individuals and civil society organisations are prioritised in the European version of the concept (Levrau, 2018). The foundation of Canadian interculturalism, especially in Quebec, is the acceptance of the dominance of the culture of the francophone nation. It seeks to respect diversity while integrating various cultural communities into a shared public culture centred around the French language and Interculturalidad, a distinct form of interculturalism, has existed in the field of education for a long time in post-colonial Latin America.

In addition, the early 1980s saw the emergence of contemporary interculturalism as a viable diversity policy tool in Canada, notably with the goal of safeguarding Québécois's national identity. (Elias & Mansouri, 2020) Interculturalism rose to prominence in research on diverse governance and immigrant integration throughout the ensuing decades and the publication of the 2008 Council of Europe White Paper hastened

this revival even more. (White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. Living Together as Equals in Dignity, 2008)

The Council of Europe White Paper emerged in Europe amid a political and sociocultural environment characterised by escalating anti-immigrant sentiments, perceived barriers to integration for minorities, and increased security worries related to the global war on terror. The theoretical uniqueness and potential supremacy of the intercultural (IC) approach over its multicultural (MC) counterpart have since attracted a considerable body of interdisciplinary research. (Elias & Mansouri, 2020) Concentrated areas of this discussion include international relations, migration research, education, and allied topics.

However, even though there is disagreement on its conceptual limits, especially in light of other concepts like MC, (Modood 2017; Levrau and Loobuyck 2013) intercultural (IC) study has grown over the past twenty years. As Ingrid Piller (2012) said, “When it comes to talking about “intercultural communication,” “misunderstanding” and “miscommunication” are never far away” and explained that the study of intercultural communication is an active area of research that has its roots in issues about culture and cultural diversity. It recognises that the field faces difficulties because of the researcher's viewpoint and the surrounding discourses. Language studies and interactional sociolinguistics are two ways that linguistics contributes to this discipline. It emphasises that the main means of intercultural communication is natural language. It is important to consider both the speakers' accessible tools and the nonverbal and verbal signals of their interactions when analysing linguistic interactions between speakers from various linguistic backgrounds. Misunderstandings during intercultural communication are occasionally related to culture, according to interactional sociolinguistics research.

Nevertheless, culture is still widespread, and participants may still lean towards it even if it isn't explicitly mentioned. In order to pinpoint conversations where culture is important, both overtly and implicitly, discourse analysis is essential. By looking at who summons culture, for whom, in what circumstances, and for what reasons, it seeks to reveal the "forgotten contexts" behind the culture. Intercultural communication should place more emphasis on investigating discourses where culture is significant and serves as a resource for communication rather than on strict concepts of cultural difference. (Piller, 2012)

Clara Sarmiento (2014) explained the concept of interculturalism as “the place where the overlapping of cultures occurs, which is the characteristic of a site of cultural translation. This sort of cultural translation may work as that “return of the excluded,” pushing limits, bringing about epistemological changes and opening new spaces for free discussion and independent research.” (p.605) Sarmiento also makes the argument that regional and global practises and knowledge are not distinct from one another but rather linked, producing an engaging tension. Finding local conceptions inspires the creation of fresh thoughts and promotes transdisciplinary and cross-cultural adaptability however, approaches should consider a region's changing ideological and material conditions. In a post-colonial world, the investigation of concepts and the forces influencing people, communities, and nations is shaped by the intersections of past, present, global, and local dynamics. Post-colonial societies require ongoing negotiation and improvisation since they are made up of various sectors and venues that are intertwined with various logic.

Contrary to multiculturalism, the idea of interculturalism recognises the reciprocal dynamics that give rise to multicultural places. It develops from stories of dynamic conflicts. Multiculturalism theories and policies emerge in a number of forms, each rooted in distinct national contexts. While multiculturalism has spread throughout Europe over the past two decades, it has also drawn criticism for both its policy and its theoretical underpinnings. According to its detractors, multiculturalism's emphasis on recognising group identities, accommodating religious practises, and emphasising cultural diversity has resulted in discrimination between ethnic groups in European societies as well as a lack of community cohesion. (Stokke & Lybæk, 2018)

Multiculturalism is also an assessment of how different people from various cultures coexist in the same physical or theoretical space while ideally acknowledging their shared right to coexist. This is true in terms of recollections, options, references, principles, preferences, projects, goals, experiences, practises, and attitudes. Not only does multiculturalism advocate for the right to coexist on a given piece of land, but also for the duty to do so in accordance with the various groups' and communities' respective cultures. (Clara Sarmiento 2014) The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue published by The Council of Europe in 2008 might therefore be considered a response to these multiculturalism-related critiques. Zapata-Barrero (2012) describes interculturalism as a liberal criticism of multiculturalism, one that understands culture as an expression of individual identity that is open, flexible, and dynamic.

Lastly, as Sarmiento mentioned, Interculturalism is presented in four different ways by Meer and Modood (2012) as a beneficial alternative to multiculturalism. First off, rather than focusing on merely coexisting, interculturalism emphasises engagement and communication. Second, it is considered to be more synthesis-oriented and less group identity-focused. Thirdly, it is thought that interculturalism fosters societal cohesiveness and national citizenship. Last but not least, in contrast to multiculturalism, interculturalism is far more likely to participate in intercultural dialogue critique of illiberal cultural practices. The multicultural framework, according to Modood, has enabled the transition from biological racism to cultural racism, preserving the self-other dichotomy and a naturalistic, essentialist view of culture that homogenises identities. In the absence of explicit racial categorization, this reductionist approach favours cultural explanations and disregards other factors, potentially resulting in racism. According to this viewpoint, cultures are thought to occupy separate, incompatible places and explain behaviours in terms that are mutually exclusive.

Interculturalism and the process of intercultural adaptation are equally crucial concepts to examine when someone relocates to a new nation. A person's manner of life and communication must change if they want to fit into a new culture. This is the intercultural adaption process. (Gill, 2007) Kim, also referred to this as a “situation when a person enters into a new culture, he or she may first enter into a state of “disequilibrium”; after a while, the individual would find the balance” (Alamri, 2018 p. 78) Many people are impacted by intercultural adaptation because of the close ties between cultures in our increasingly globalised environment. During this adaptation time, Lysgaard (1995) mentions that there are four important stages that are important to examine. Honeymoon, crisis, adjustment, and biculturalism are the four phases. People feel an initial pleasure from being abroad in a foreign nation during the honeymoon stage. Living in a foreign culture causes antagonism and irritation during the crisis stage. Next comes progressive adaptation and recuperation, and biculturalism is complete adaptation. Everybody experiences culture shock during intercultural adaption, which can have an impact on their communication and behaviour. (Sawyer & Chen, 2011) Renata Čuhlová (2019) also explains this by stating that individuals may experience everything from minor emotional illnesses to serious psychoses as a result of culture shock. Some scholars prefer the word "acculturative stress," which they believe better describes the context of how cultures interact. The type and duration of the stress scenario, as well as the

individual's predispositions—some people tend to build coping mechanisms for rapid adaptation much more easily—determine the strength of the expatriate's reaction to the new cultural milieu. After the stage of cultural stress, there follows a stage of alienation from the host culture, which is characterised by hatred and the pursuit of unfavourable stereotypes. Only after a few months have passed since the assignment started are functional and cultural adaptations established. However, it is also mentioned that the reverse can happen and even after returning, the ex-pat first experiences what is known as a reverse cultural shock, which is the "process of re-adaptation, acculturation, and assimilation into an individual's native environment after spending more time in a different culture" (Čuhlová, 2019).

In order for this intercultural adaptation process to work, the ex-pats need to develop a set of skills or competencies to aid it. The ability to effectively communicate with people from various cultural backgrounds is referred to as intercultural competence. This concept is crucial for influencing an individual's performance and cultural adaptation, and as a result, the success of an expatriate's stay. The intercultural competencies describe the awareness, expertise, and abilities required for successful work across racial and cultural disparities of various groups. (Ilie, 2019)

The process of developing intercultural competencies involves intercultural confrontation, formation of intercultural experience, intercultural learning, and intercultural understanding, as well as personality predispositions (such as self-reflection, empathy, cultural sensitivity, curiosity, self-confidence, and reduced anxiety). Ilie also helped define intercultural communication with some primary attitudes. Respect, openness, and curiosity/discovery are essential attitudes for effective cross-cultural dialogue. Building long-lasting connections with people who have different opinions and values requires being considerate of others, actively listening to what they have to say, and expressing your value to them. To be open and curious, we must be prepared to leave our comfort zones.

The discussion of culture, which includes a group's beliefs, values, and conventions, involves several different categories of knowledge. Among these are sociolinguistic awareness, cultural self-awareness, knowledge of particular cultures, and deep cultural understanding. People can better comprehend and navigate cultural variations and their effects on communication behaviours by acquiring these types of

knowledge. Process the new knowledge and build intercultural competence by using skills including observation, listening, analysis, evaluation, interpretation, and relation.

Critical self-reflection is also essential for this development. The ideal consequence is for people to develop the necessary attitudes, knowledge, and abilities, which will lead to internal qualities like empathy, adaptability, and flexibility. They will therefore be better able to react to others in accordance with their expectations. A person's level of competence and understanding in these areas will determine how effective their communication is the aforementioned internal outcomes—attitudes, knowledge, abilities, and skills—lead to the outward outcomes—effective intercultural communication behaviours. These results include the observable, doable behaviours that demonstrate successful cross-cultural communication. (Ilie, 2019)

Intercultural communication is a talent that global business executives must master if they want to successfully share information with individuals from around the world. They have to consider nonverbal communication codes, distance, timing, cultural background, and customs. Diversity acceptance is essential for successful businesses since it enhances the environment at work, employee morale, creativity, and production. Intercultural sensitivity, intercultural awareness, and intercultural adroitness are all recognised in Guo-Ming Chen and William G. Starosta's model of intercultural competence. (1996)

Intercultural communication skills include effective interpersonal and interaction skills, knowledge of various cultures and customs, proficiency in a second language, proficiency with communication technologies, data processing and analysis, flexibility, awareness of gender issues and equal opportunity. They also include tolerance, cultural sensitivity, awareness of cultural differences, and knowledge of various cultures. Theoretical approaches pinpoint competencies like personality strength, social and message communication abilities, psychological flexibility, and cultural sensitivity. The business approach places a strong emphasis on interpersonal, cognitive, and self-maintenance abilities. For successful cross-cultural communication, the military method emphasises the importance of self-awareness, self-respect, interaction, empathy, adaptation, certainty, initiative, and acceptance. (Ilie, 2019)

One of the most important features is communication, without a doubt, communication is the focus of the current interculturalist approach. Indeed, an

intercultural approach aims to facilitate dialogue, exchange, and reciprocal understanding between people of different backgrounds through the key characteristics and methods of communication.

The use of social media for Interculturalism

Social media has made human civilization more integrated and sophisticated thanks to its unique features, but it also puts the existence of conventional human communication under threat. Social media not only alters the presentation and substance of information and messages, but it also has an impact on how individuals comprehend one another during human interactions, particularly when those individuals come from diverse cultural or ethnic backgrounds. Intercultural adaptation requires adjustment, and social media has an impact on this process (Sawyer & Chen).

Additionally, communication gaps between various cultural and ethnic groups are fostered by new media in an extrinsic manner. Old cultural grammar, themes, or maps have been replaced by new ones due to the fragmented nature of social media, which has led to the disappearance of old cultural logic. As a result, it is clear that the adaptability of information shared and presented in new media will have a direct impact on how intercultural relationships develop in the online community through the development of a network of personal connections (e.g., Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

According to Elola and Oskoz's 2008 research, blogging boosted participants' intercultural communication skills while also having a favourable impact on the growth of cross-cultural relationships in contexts involving foreign languages and studying abroad. Social media not only fosters interpersonal interactions across cultures but also helps build global commercial connections. Sawyer & Chen (2011), also explained that the Internet has emerged as one of the most widely utilised mediums among immigrants, enabling them to electronically connect with both the locals in their host country and their family and friends back home. The host social communication and the ethnic social communication are crucial elements in an online environment that can help, or hinder adaptation. Intercultural adaptation is impacted by social, physical, and cultural factors of social media.

However, new media may also have a detrimental effect on cross-cultural communication. (Chen, 2012) For instance, Qian and Scott (2007) discovered that divulging too much personal information in blogs, particularly unfavourable information

about one's friends, job, and others, tends to jeopardise or complicate developing healthy intracultural and intercultural human interactions. As a result, migrants no longer only consume information passively or rely solely on conventional media to deepen their connection with both their home communities and those of their host countries in the absence of direct contact. (Gaitán-Aguilar, 2019)

In a 2012 study by Sawyer and Chen, it was shown that the significance of how looking for relationships on social media platforms affects cross-cultural adjustment. According to the participant reports, social media is used by people to develop, strengthen, and maintain relationships. Conversations and exchanges create a sense of connectivity, which is crucial for engaging with citizens of both the host and the home countries. These ties and connections are crucial for overcoming adjustment difficulties and fostering a feeling of community. (Sawyer & Chen, 2011)

Similarly, to this, Sawyer (2011) looked into how social media was used and its impact on how overseas students adapted to their new cultures. According to the findings, social media facilitated the development of personal connections between international students and citizens of both their countries of origin and hosts while also fostering a sense of cultural belonging. Social media undoubtedly helped overseas students get through cultural hurdles during the intercultural adaptation stage. The study also showed that after arriving in the host country, students typically relied more heavily on social media to remain in touch with their relatives and friends in order to deal with psychological challenges like culture shock. By doing this, the sojourners were able to become somewhat at ease in their new surroundings. (Alamri, 2018)

However, as Usova et al. (2020) claimed in their article, even though international students typically utilise social media to keep in touch with their relatives, only around half of them regard social media as a way to increase their social relationships and they are not very interested in the social content that other users publish. Less than a third of students utilise social networking sites to learn about their university and courses. Some students' unfamiliarity with Russian social networking sites and ignorance of their social and informative potential can be blamed for this low level of engagement. The recommended strategy for foreign student departments is to include employees and professors in using social networking sites to address educational difficulties. Additionally, domestic students might be sought out to serve as tutors through social media platforms for international students. (Usova et al., 2020)

Mobility programs in ISCAP

ISCAP is a prominent institution that operates under the umbrella of the renowned Erasmus program. Each year, ISCAP facilitates the exchange of numerous students, both sending and receiving them from various universities across the globe. This collaboration allows students to experience diverse cultures, gain international exposure, and enhance their educational journey. Additionally, ISCAP offers a remarkable opportunity through its double degree program. This program enables students to pursue studies at ISCAP while simultaneously obtaining a degree from a partner institution, fostering a truly comprehensive and globally oriented education. Through these initiatives, ISCAP continues to play an integral role in promoting internationalization and providing students with a unique and enriching academic experience. (GRI ISCAP, 2021)

The Erasmus program is a comprehensive and influential initiative that encompasses various facets of international education and cooperation. It operates under the framework of the European Union's Lifelong Learning Program, with the aim of promoting the mobility and exchange of students, teachers, and staff across European countries. One of the primary objectives of the Erasmus program is to enable students to study abroad and experience different cultures, languages, and educational systems. Through Erasmus+, students can spend a semester or an academic year at a partner institution in another European country, earning credits that are recognized by their home university. This opportunity allows students to immerse themselves in a different academic environment, gain a broader perspective, and develop intercultural skills that are increasingly valued in today's globalized world. In addition to student mobility, Erasmus also supports the professional development of teachers and staff in higher education institutions. Through teaching and training assignments, educators can spend a period of time at a partner institution, sharing their expertise, exchanging best practices, and acquiring new teaching methods or research skills. This cross-pollination of ideas and knowledge contributes to the overall quality and innovation in European higher education. (European Commission, 2022)

Furthermore, Erasmus promotes institutional cooperation and networking among universities and colleges across Europe. Through strategic partnerships, higher education institutions can collaborate on joint projects, research activities, and curriculum development. This collaboration fosters the sharing of expertise, promotes innovation in

teaching and learning, and encourages the development of joint degree programs or academic pathways. The Erasmus program also encompasses various initiatives to support disadvantaged or underrepresented groups, including students with disabilities, those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, or individuals with fewer opportunities. Erasmus provides additional funding and resources to ensure their equal access to international experiences and educational opportunities. (European Commission, 2022)

In recent years, the Erasmus program has expanded its scope and impact through the Erasmus+ program, which incorporates additional fields beyond higher education, such as vocational education and training, youth exchanges, and sports activities. This broader scope reflects the program's commitment to promoting lifelong learning, intercultural understanding, and active citizenship across various sectors. (What Is Erasmus+?, n.d.)

Overall, the Erasmus program has significantly contributed to the European Higher Education Area, fostering a sense of European identity, promoting academic excellence, and facilitating international cooperation. It has played a crucial role in breaking down barriers, building bridges between cultures, and preparing students for the challenges of a globalized world. (European Parliament, 2020)

In addition, ISCAP also offers a double degree program, which provides an exceptional opportunity for students to obtain two degrees simultaneously, enhancing their academic and professional prospects. ISCAP's double degree program entails collaboration with partner institutions, both within Europe and beyond where through these partnerships, students can pursue their studies at ISCAP while also completing a portion of their coursework at the partner institution. This arrangement enables participants to benefit from the academic offerings, teaching methodologies, and cultural experiences provided by each institution.

The program typically involves an extended period of study (usually 1 year), during which students have the chance to immerse themselves in different academic environments, collaborate with international peers, and expand their global networks. By completing the program's requirements, students are awarded degrees from both ISCAP and the partner institution, validating their achievements and enhancing their credentials. ISCAP's double degree program not only promotes academic excellence but also nurtures

cross-cultural understanding and equips graduates with the skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. (Programas De Duplo Diploma – GRI – ISCAP, 2021)

Conclusion

Social media, a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, defies a universally agreed-upon definition due to its diverse characteristics and the lack of consensus across disciplines (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Scholars have proposed various definitions, emphasizing user-generated content, online communication, and networking (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Russo et al., 2008). However, these definitions often fail to capture the unique technological and social affordances of social media. Carr and Hayes (2015) distinguish social media as Internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of masspersonal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content.

Social media has revolutionized communication, breaking down barriers and allowing individuals to connect, exchange ideas, and mobilize for causes (Amedie, 2015). It has provided opportunities for collaboration, both academically and in business settings, enhancing learning outcomes and marketing strategies (Sawyer & Chen, 2011). Moreover, social media promotes intercultural interaction and connectivity, enabling individuals to engage with diverse cultures and communities (Akram & Kumar, 2017).

Interculturalism, a concept that predates the current discourse on diversity management, has gained significant attention in different contexts and regions (ZapataBarrero, 2017; Elias & Mansouri, 2020). In Europe, the intercultural approach has emerged as a response to anti-immigrant sentiments and integration challenges (Levräu, 2018). The Council of Europe White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue has further fuelled research on interculturalism, examining its potential superiority over multiculturalism (Elias & Mansouri, 2020). Intercultural communication, rooted in issues of culture and diversity, investigates linguistic interactions and the role of culture in understanding and miscommunication (Piller, 2012).

The intersection of social media and interculturalism presents both opportunities and challenges. Social media platforms facilitate intercultural communication, knowledge exchange, and community development (Chen, 2012; Elola & Oskoz, 2009). However, they can also lead to negative outcomes, such as the dissemination of personal

information that hampers constructive relationships (Chen, 2012). Despite these challenges, social media's impact on intercultural communication and education is significant, enabling individuals to connect and interact across cultures, expanding their understanding and perspectives (Park et al., 2014; Pang, 2020).

In conclusion, social media has transformed communication, fostering global interconnectedness and intercultural exchange. It offers numerous benefits, including connectivity, education, business opportunities, and support for just causes. Interculturalism, as a framework, promotes the understanding and interaction between diverse cultures, and social media plays a vital role in facilitating this process. However, further research is needed to address the challenges and explore the full potential of social media in promoting intercultural understanding and cooperation.

II – THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONGST MOBILITY STUDENTS- A SURVEY OF ISCAP MOBILITY STUDENTS

Introduction

To properly analyse the impact of social media during Erasmus and their intercultural experience, a survey was specifically designed to gather information. It was sent to Erasmus students who have participated in mobility programs at ISCAP between the years 2019 and 2023 as well as students from ISCAP who had undertaken mobility programs abroad during the same period. However, the survey was given to about 5 people before it was delivered to the targeted students to validate it and get their feedback on it.

To reach a broad range of potential respondents, the survey was distributed through email to all the Erasmus students who had participated in mobility programs at ISCAP within the specified period comprising around 700 which represents the universe. The emails included a brief explanation of the research goals and a link to access the survey online.

In total, 103 individuals responded to the survey and the dataset comprised a mix of qualitative and quantitative information, allowing for a multi-dimensional analysis. Before proceeding with the analysis, the data was carefully organized and analysed and a total of 4 of these responses were deemed invalid as they did not align with the intended questions. Due to the removal of these 4 responses from the dataset, the sample size was decreased to 99 legitimate responses, which represents more than 10% of the 700 respondents and confirms the validity of the survey.

Survey Analyses

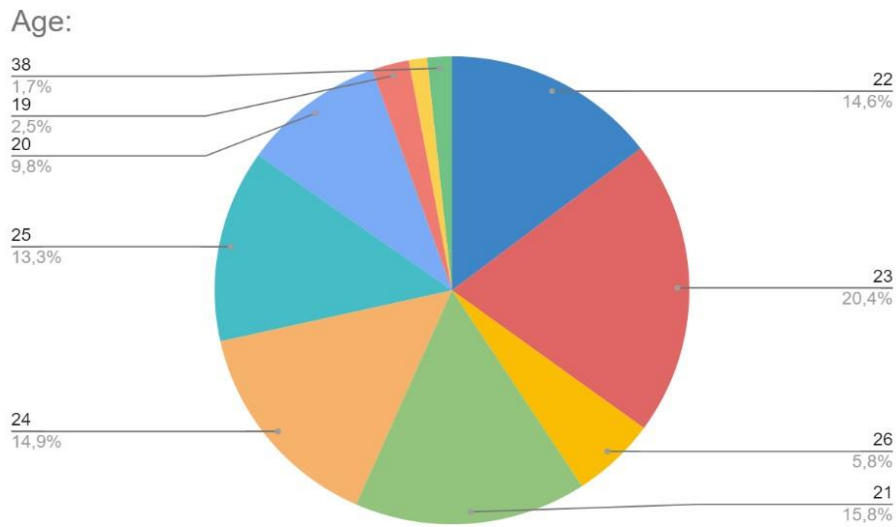


Figure 1- Graph on the age of the survey participants

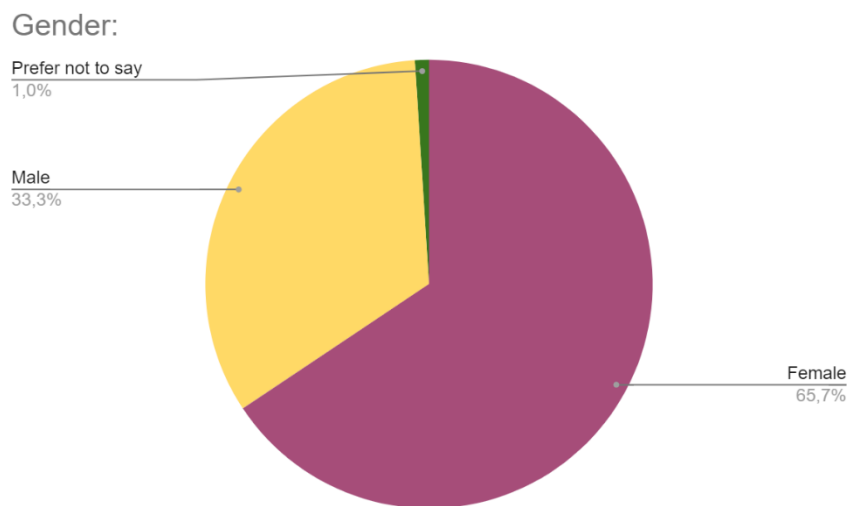


Figure 2- Graph on the gender of the survey participants

Upon analysing the first two graphs derived from the survey data, we have gained valuable insights into the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The data revealed that the ages of the participants varied between 19 and 38, with the majority of respondents being 23 years old, followed by 21. Furthermore, it revealed that the majority of survey respondents were women, comprising 65.7% of the total participants. These initial insights into the age distribution and gender composition of the survey respondents provide a foundation for further analysis and interpretation of the data. They serve as a

starting point for exploring potential correlations between demographic factors and the reported experiences, perceptions, and outcomes of the Erasmus mobility programs.

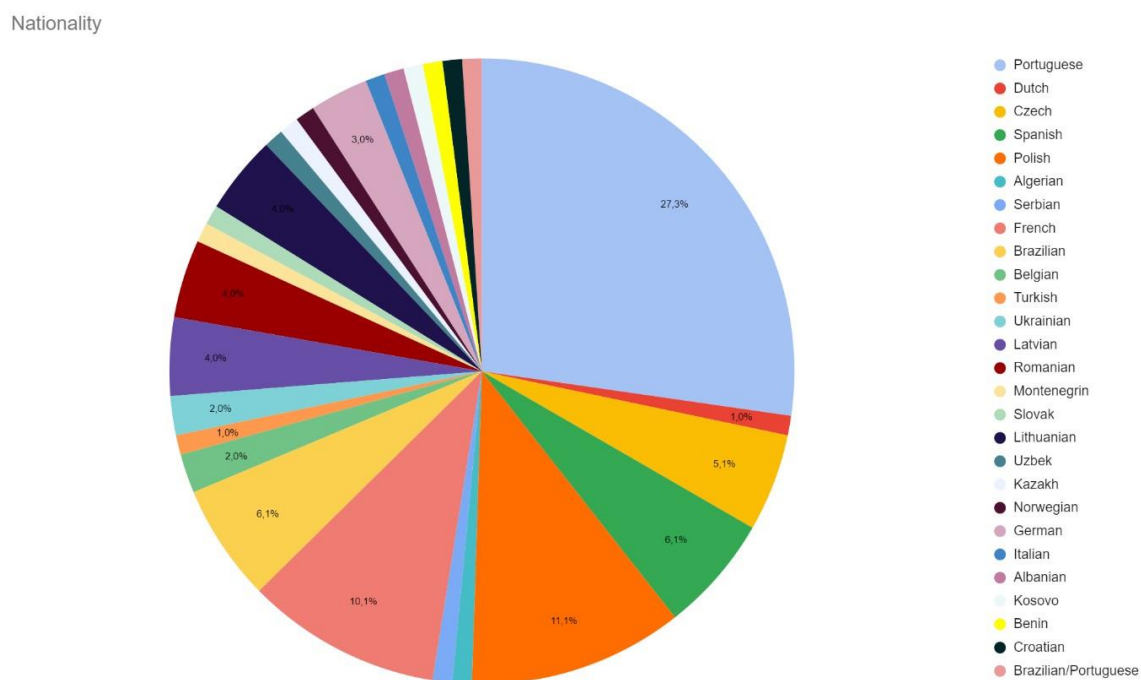


Figure 3- Graph on the nationality of the survey participants

In addition to age and gender, an examination of the 3rd graph also provided insights into the nationalities of the survey participants. The data indicated a diverse range of nationalities among the respondents, representing individuals from various parts of the world who have engaged in Erasmus mobility programs at ISCAP.

The analysis revealed that the majority of participants were of Portuguese nationality, comprising a significant proportion of the respondents. Following closely were individuals from Polish and French backgrounds. This diverse mix of nationalities highlights the global appeal and inclusivity of the Erasmus program at ISCAP, attracting students from different countries and cultural backgrounds. Understanding the nationalities of the survey participants allows for further exploration of potential variations in experiences, perspectives, and outcomes based on cultural backgrounds.

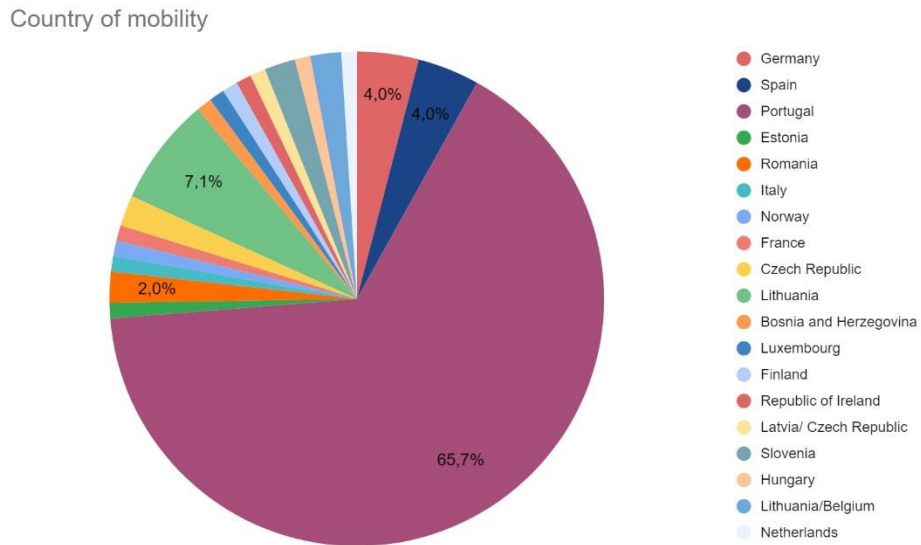


Figure 4- Graph on the country of mobility of the survey participants

Upon analysing the graph representing the Erasmus destination of the survey respondents, it becomes evident that the majority of participants answered the survey based on their Erasmus experience in Portugal. However, it is worth noting that the graph also indicates the presence of respondents who have completed their Erasmus mobility programs in other countries such as Lithuania, Spain and Germany, among other destinations.

The inclusion of respondents who have experienced Erasmus mobility programs in various countries adds further diversity and breadth to the data analysis. It allows for a comparative exploration of experiences across different host countries, examining potential variations in academic, cultural, and social integration, as well as the overall impact of the Erasmus experience.

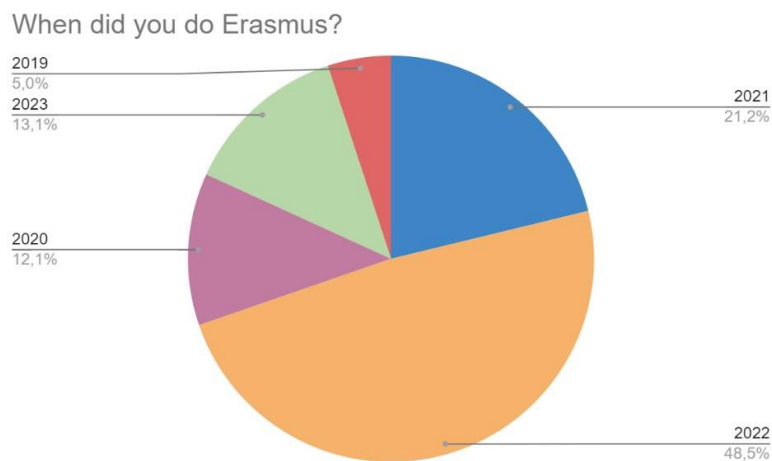


Figure 5- Graph on the mobility year of the survey participants

In this graph, we can examine the timeline of participants' Erasmus experiences. The data shows that the majority of respondents, accounting for almost half of the participants, went on Erasmus in 2022. This indicates that a significant portion of the survey responses are recent, providing up-to-date insights into the participants' experiences.

Following behind, participants who embarked on their Erasmus journey in 2021 were the next largest group. These responses still represent relatively recent experiences, since they only represent mobility from 2019 until 2023 providing valuable information on the Erasmus programs conducted in these recent years.

The distribution across different years suggests that the survey captured a diverse range of Erasmus experiences, encompassing both recent and slightly older mobility periods. This diversity in timing adds depth and variety to the overall dataset, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives across multiple years.

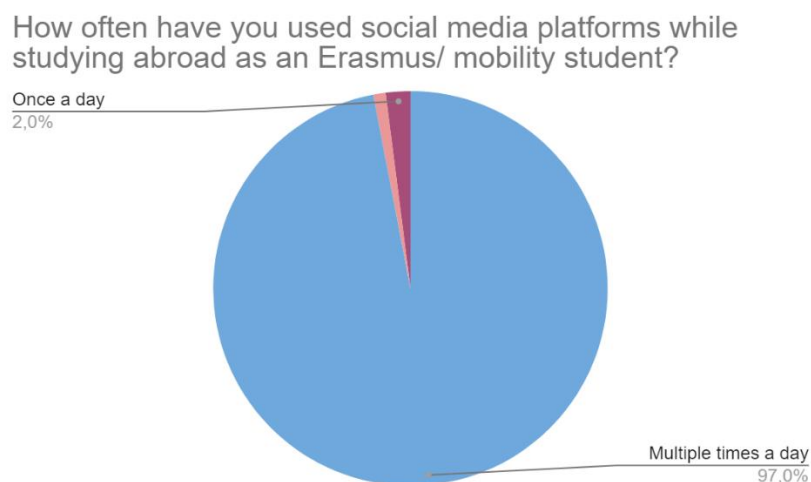


Figure 6- Graph on how often the participants use social media while studying abroad

When examining the frequency of social media usage during the Erasmus experience, a striking observation emerges. The vast majority of participants, amounting to 97%, reported using social media multiple times a day while on their Erasmus mobility program. This finding showcases the pervasive role of social media in the lives of Erasmus students. In addition, a small fraction of respondents (2%) stated that they used social media once a day and 1% use it a few times a week indicating a less frequent but still significant engagement with these platforms.

Notably, no participants reported rarely or never using social media during their Erasmus experience. The high prevalence of frequent social media usage aligns with the broader trend of digital connectivity and the widespread use of social networking platforms in today's society.

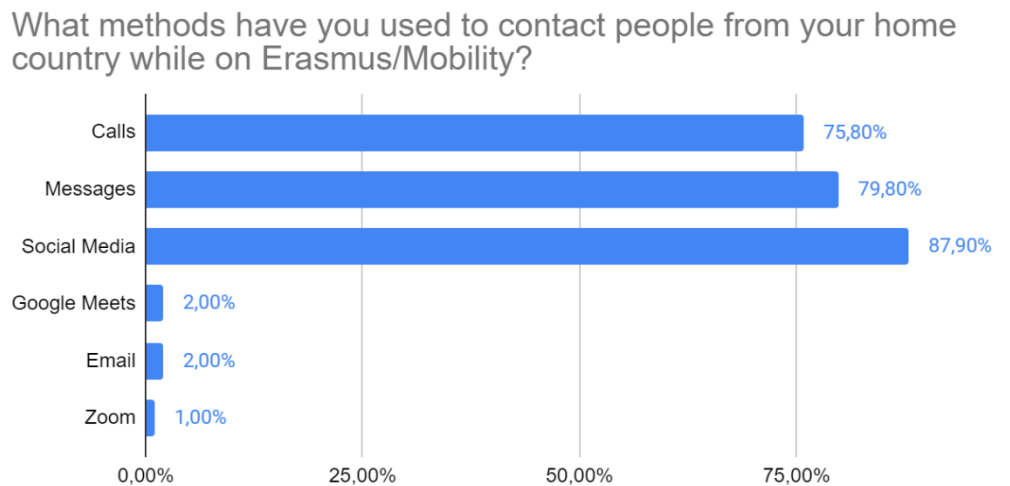


Figure 7- Graph on methods used by participants to contact people from their home country while on mobility

For this graph, we can observe a diverse range of responses. Social media emerged as the most popular communication method, with 87.9% of respondents indicating its usage. However, it is noteworthy that messages and calls were also commonly utilized, with 79.8% and 75.8% of participants respectively choosing these methods.

The predominance of social media as a communication tool aligns with the previous findings highlighting the high frequency of social media usage during the Erasmus experience. It suggests that maintaining contact with people from their home country is one of the primary reasons why participants engage with social media platforms so frequently while on Erasmus. These platforms enable instant messaging, sharing updates and photos, and staying connected with friends and family back home. Simultaneously, the relatively high usage of messages and calls reflects the importance of direct, personal communication for many respondents. These methods provide a more intimate and immediate means of staying in touch with loved ones, allowing for deeper connections and emotional support during the mobility period. While social media provides a convenient and widely accessible means of communication, traditional methods such as messages and calls continue to hold significance.

How important do you think social media use is for staying connected with friends and family back home?

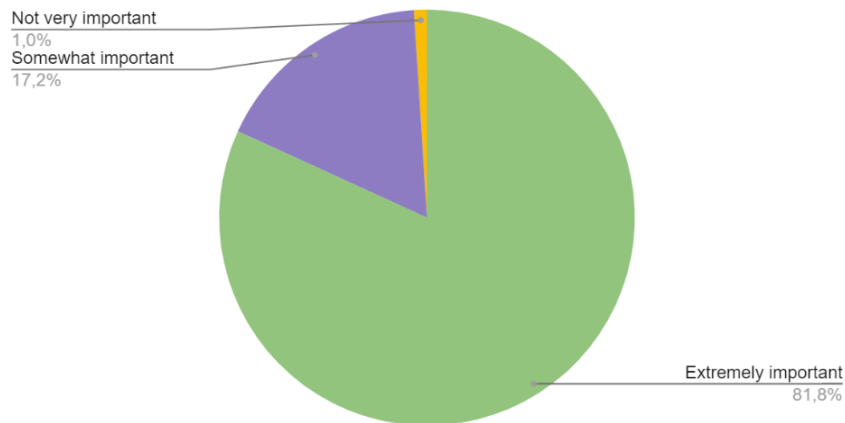


Figure 8- Graph on how important the survey participants think social media is for staying connected while abroad

Upon analysing the graph related to the perceived importance of social media as a medium to stay in touch with friends and family back home, a significant finding emerges. The data indicates that the vast majority of participants (81.8%) consider social media to be extremely important for maintaining these connections. Remarkably, no respondents reported finding social media not important at all and a mere 1% of participants expressed that they considered it not very important. These findings underscore the critical role of social media platforms in facilitating communication and connection with loved ones while on Erasmus or mobility.

The high level of perceived importance attributed to social media aligns with the previous insights revealing the widespread use of these platforms and their frequent usage during the Erasmus experience. It further emphasizes that social media serves as a primary means of staying connected. The overwhelming acknowledgement of social media's significance highlights its vital role in addressing feelings of homesickness, maintaining emotional bonds, and providing a sense of belonging for participants during their mobility period.

What methods have you used to contact people from your host country?

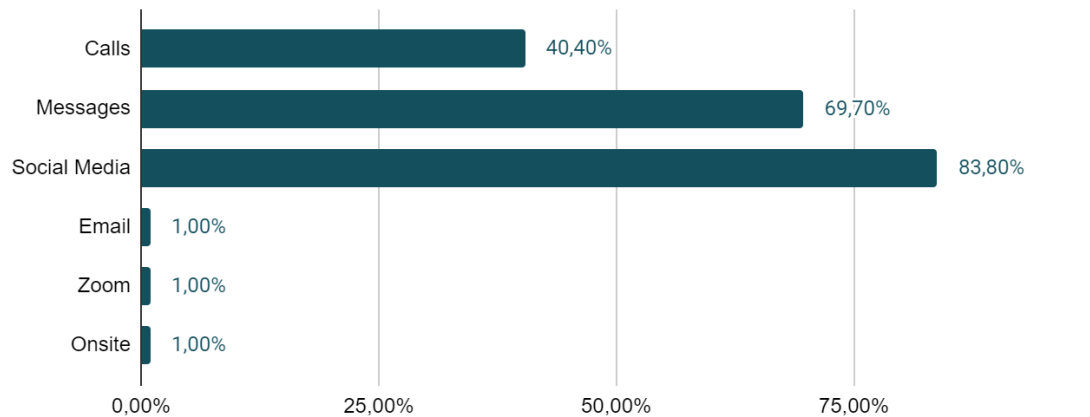


Figure 9-Graph on what methods did the survey participants use to contact people from their host country

How important do you think social media use is for staying connected with other international students or locals in your host country?

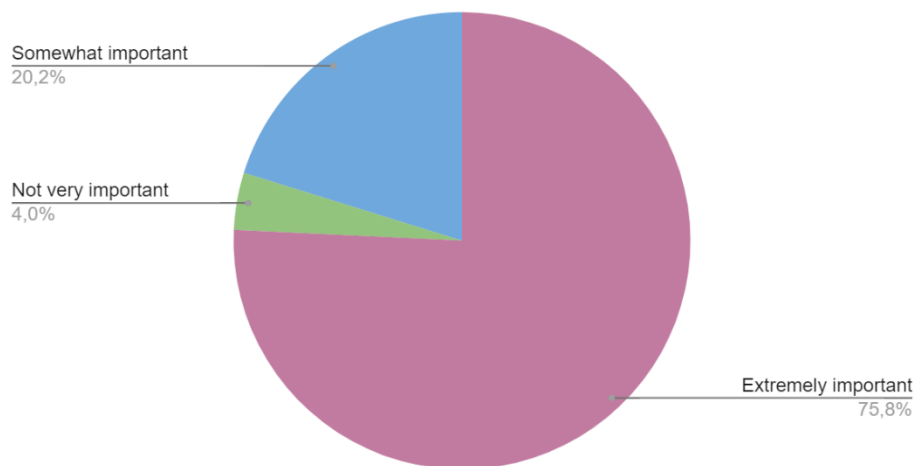


Figure 10- Graph on how important the survey participants think social media is for staying connected with other students in their host country

Analysing the two graphs related to the mediums used to keep in contact with people from the host country, and the part social media has in it we can see that there are similarities with the 2 previous graphs. The findings indicate similarities to the use of social media for staying in touch with people back home but with some notable differences.

However, there are notable distinctions when comparing the use of social media for staying in touch with people from the host country versus those back home. Participants tended to find social media slightly less important for communication with people from

the host country, although it remains a significant communication tool for the majority. This discrepancy suggests that while social media plays a crucial role in maintaining connections with both home and host countries, there may be a stronger emphasis on using it for connections with friends and family back home.

Furthermore, the data reveals that fewer participants reported using calls to keep in touch with people from the host country in comparison to its usage for communication with those back home. This discrepancy suggests that other forms of communication, such as social media or in-person interactions, may be more prevalent when connecting with individuals from the host country.

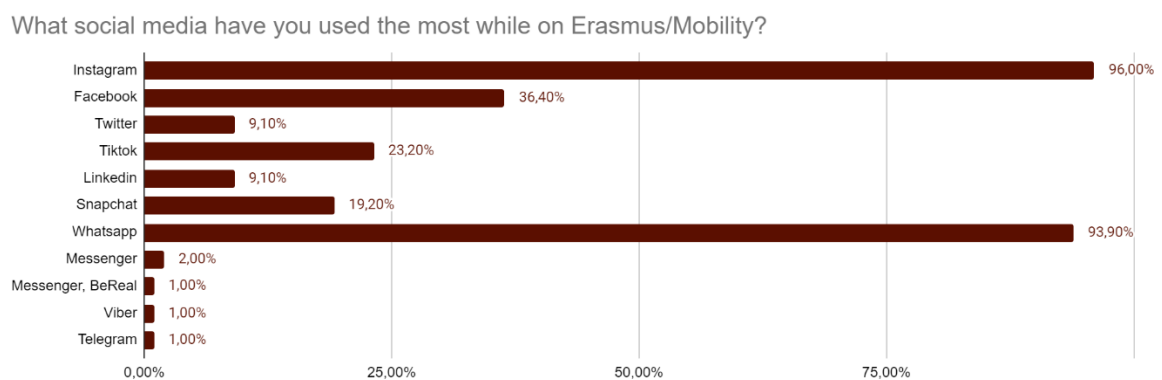


Figure 11- Graph on what social media the survey participants use most while on mobility

The graph examining the usage of different social media platforms among the participants aimed to explore the diversity of platforms and identify the most commonly used ones. The findings revealed that Instagram emerged as the most popular social media platform among the surveyed Erasmus participants, with 96% of respondents indicating its usage. WhatsApp followed closely, with 93.9% of participants choosing it as a preferred means of communication.

The significant usage of Instagram and WhatsApp highlights their widespread popularity and effectiveness in facilitating communication and social interactions during the Erasmus experience. Instagram's visual nature and focus on sharing photos and stories make it an ideal platform for documenting and sharing experiences with friends and family. Meanwhile, WhatsApp's instant messaging capabilities enable immediate communication with individuals or groups that can be beneficial to keep in touch with family or friends back home but also with other Erasmus students.

The substantial difference between the usage rates of Instagram and WhatsApp compared to other social media platforms suggests their dominance among the Erasmus

community. While other platforms may still have a presence, the majority of participants gravitate toward these two platforms for their communication needs.

Have you started using new social media while on Erasmus?

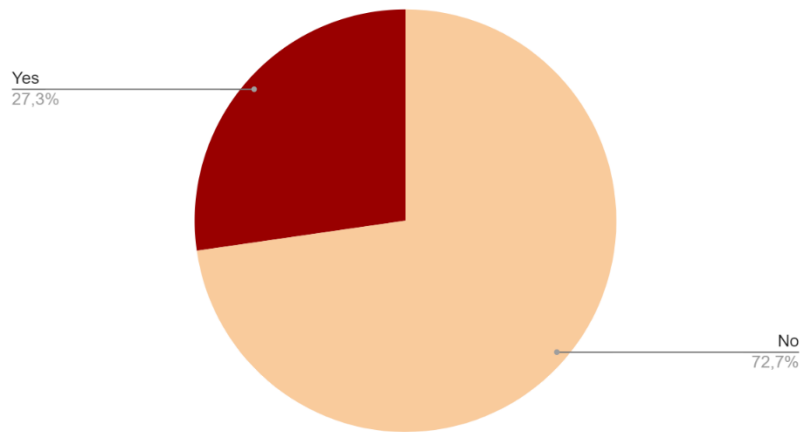


Figure 12- Graph on if the survey participants have started using new social media while on mobility

If you answered yes to the previous question say which ones

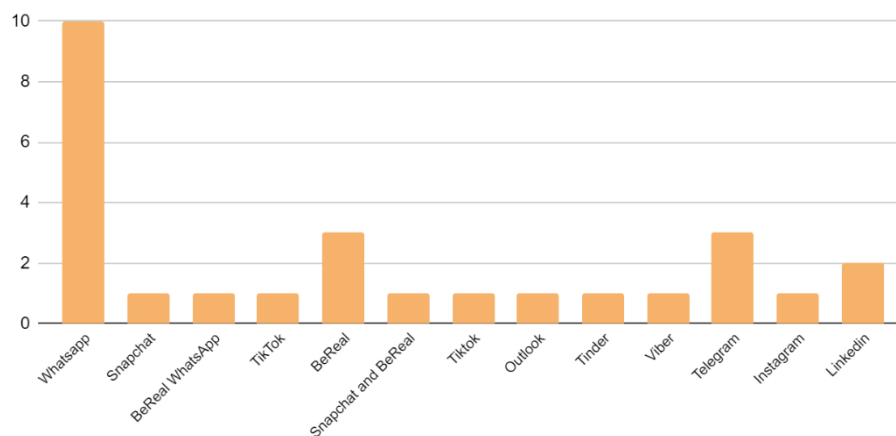


Figure 13- Graph on which social media the survey participants started to use

Continuing our exploration of social media usage during the Erasmus experience, the subsequent graphs shed light on the adoption of new social media platforms. The data indicate that a relatively small proportion of participants, 27.3%, reported starting to use new social media platforms during their Erasmus mobility.

From this subset of participants, the majority appeared to have gravitated towards WhatsApp. This finding aligns with the previous observations regarding WhatsApp's popularity and its suitability for communication with diverse individuals from various locations.

Furthermore, among the new social media platforms, BeReal was second in the graph but with a big difference from WhatsApp. BeReal is also a social media where you can share photos of what you are doing at the moment and can be used as a way to stay connected to the lives of everyone in the home country. It is worth noting that some participants started using multiple new social media platforms, indicating a willingness to diversify their digital communication tools.

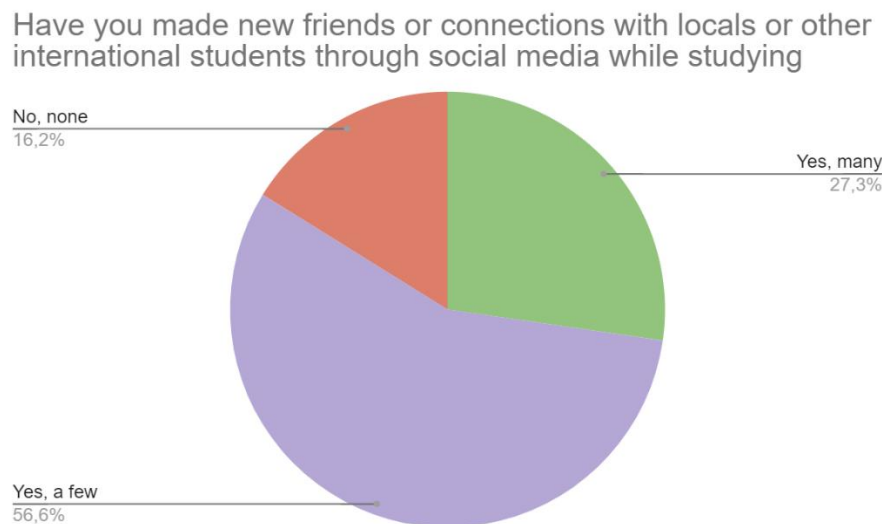


Figure 14- Graph on if the survey participants made new friends with other students through social media while on mobility

Analysing the graph related to the use of social media as a means to make new friends during the Erasmus experience, a trend emerges. While it may not have been the most prevalent method, social media still played a significant role in facilitating new friendships, with 56.6% of participants reporting that a few of their friendships were formed through these platforms and 27.3% claiming many of them were made through it.

This finding highlights the potential of social media to foster connections and create meaningful relationships among Erasmus participants. While face-to-face interactions and other offline activities likely remain vital for forging deep friendships, social media platforms provide an additional avenue for initiating and sustaining connections. They offer opportunities to connect with fellow students, join Erasmus groups or communities, and share common interests or experiences. It allows participants to reach out to like-minded individuals, expand their social networks, and create a sense

of belonging within the Erasmus community. Leveraging the potential of social media to facilitate connections can enhance the social integration and overall satisfaction of Erasmus students, complementing traditional forms of relationship building during their mobility period.

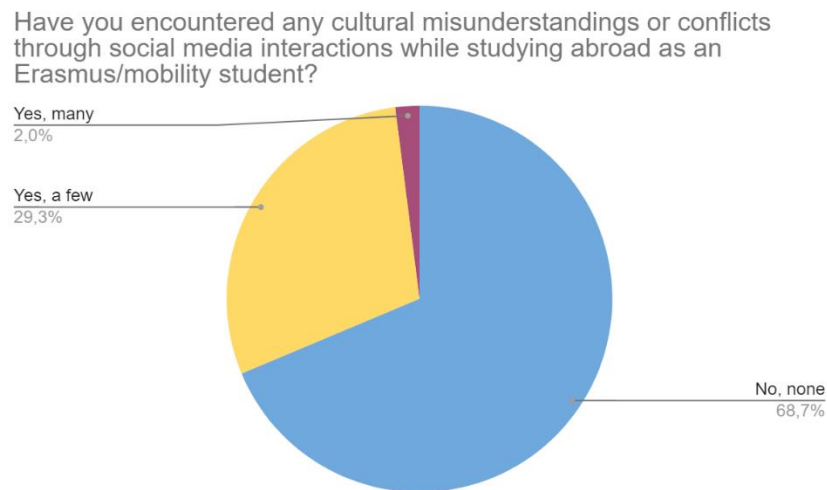


Figure 15- Graph on if the survey participants have encountered any cultural misunderstandings through social media interactions while studying abroad

Based on the data presented in the graph, we can conclude the probability of encountering conflicts or misunderstandings through social media during the Erasmus experience. The findings indicate that the majority of participants, 68.7%, reported having no issues or conflicts when using social media. This suggests that the likelihood of encountering problems or misunderstandings through these platforms was relatively low for a significant portion of the participants.

However, it is worth noting that a notable percentage of respondents, 29.3%, indicated experiencing a few misunderstandings or conflicts while using social media during their Erasmus journey. This finding highlights that, although social media can be a valuable tool for communication and connection, it is not immune to potential challenges. Misunderstandings can arise due to differences in cultural norms, language barriers, or misinterpretations of messages or intentions. In addition, a smaller proportion of participants, 2%, reported encountering many conflicts or misunderstandings through social media during their Erasmus experience. While this percentage is relatively low, it still underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the potential drawbacks and challenges that may arise when using social media as a communication tool.

Have you used social media to explore and get to know your host country's culture and traditions?

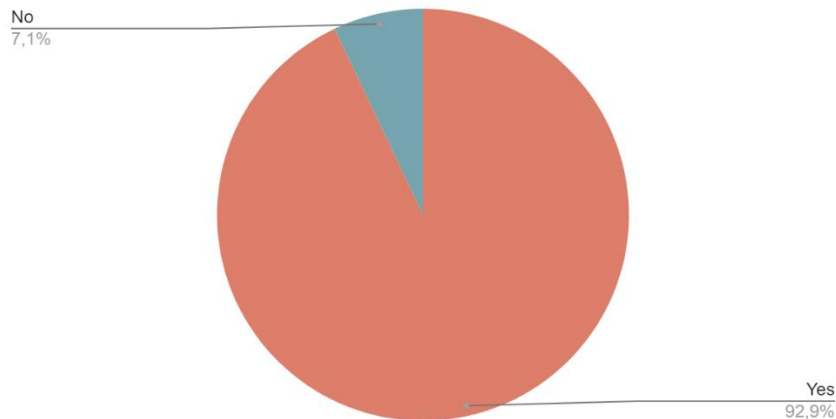


Figure 16- Graph on if the survey participants have used social media to explore the host country's culture and traditions

Examining the data presented in the graph, the findings indicate that a significant majority, 92.9% of participants, reported using social media platforms as a tool to gain a deeper understanding of the traditions and culture of the host country. This high percentage reflects the potential of social media to serve as a valuable resource for Erasmus participants in their quest to immerse themselves in the local culture and heritage.

Social media platforms offer a diverse range of content, including posts, photos, videos, and discussions, that allow individuals to explore and learn about various aspects of the host country's traditions, customs, festivals, cuisine, landmarks, and more. By utilizing social media, participants can access first-hand accounts, insights, and recommendations from locals, fellow Erasmus students, and cultural enthusiasts. This exposure enables them to appreciate and engage with the host country's cultural fabric, fostering a richer and more immersive experience during their Erasmus mobility.

Do you think social media use has helped you to become more aware of cultural differences while studying abroad as an Erasmus/mobility student?

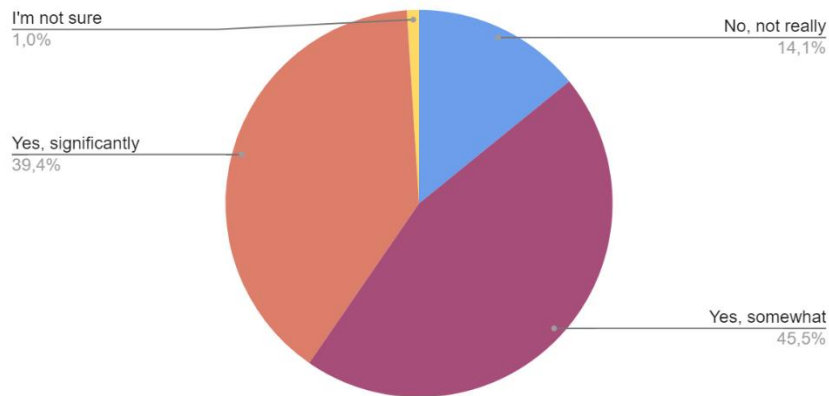


Figure 17- Graph on if the survey participants think social media has helped them to become more aware of cultural differences while abroad

Examining the data presented in the graph, we can observe the impact of social media on participants' awareness of cultural differences while being abroad during the Erasmus experience. The findings reveal that nearly half of the participants, 45.5%, claimed that social media has helped them become somewhat more aware of cultural differences. Furthermore, a notable proportion of participants, 39.4%, reported that social media significantly helped them be more aware of cultural differences while abroad. This indicates that social media platforms played a role in exposing participants to diverse cultural perspectives, practices, and customs. Through the content shared on social media, such as posts, photos, videos, and discussions, participants were able to gain insights and broaden their understanding of the cultural nuances present in their host country. This increased awareness can contribute to a more informed and respectful engagement with the local culture and facilitate cross-cultural interactions as well as bridge cultural gaps and facilitate meaningful engagement with different traditions, values, and ways of life.

Do you think social media use has helped you to better understand and appreciate different cultures while studying abroad as an Erasmus/mobility student?

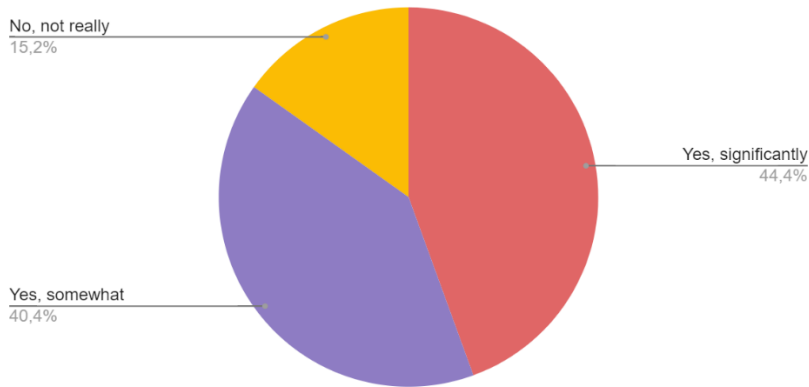


Figure 18- Graph on if the survey participants think social media use has helped them to better understand different cultures

Following the data presented in the graph, we can observe the impact of social media on participants' understanding and appreciation of different cultures during their Erasmus experience. It indicates that a significant proportion of participants, 44.4%, reported that social media has helped them understand and appreciate different cultures. This shows that social media platforms played a crucial role in broadening participants' perspectives and fostering a deeper understanding of diverse cultures, with very similar conclusions from the previous graph.

Furthermore, an additional 40.4% of participants mentioned that social media somewhat helped them understand and appreciate different cultures. This suggests that even though the impact may not have been as significant for this group, social media still played a role in increasing their cultural understanding to some extent. Combining these two percentages, we can observe a significant overall impact of social media on participants' understanding and appreciation of different cultures. The data underscores the valuable role that social media platforms can play in fostering intercultural learning, promoting cultural understanding, and nurturing a global mindset among Erasmus students.

Do you think social media use has had any negative impacts on your intercultural experiences while studying abroad as an Erasmus/mobility student?

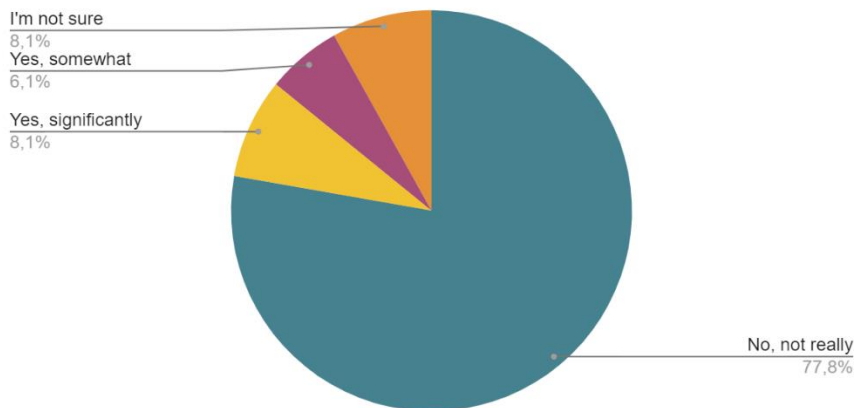


Figure 19- Graph on whether the survey participants think social media use has had any negative impacts on their intercultural experiences while abroad

The data from the graph reveals participants' perceptions regarding the impact of social media on their intercultural experience during Erasmus. The majority of participants, comprising 77.8%, expressed that they did not perceive any negative impacts arising from social media usage. This suggests that participants generally viewed social media as a positive or neutral influence on their intercultural interactions and learning.

However, it is worth noting that a small percentage, 8.1%, reported experiencing significant negative impacts related to social media. These negative impacts could encompass issues such as miscommunication, misunderstandings, or exposure to cultural stereotypes. Additionally, 8.1% of participants were unsure about the impact of social media, suggesting a range of experiences where some encountered both positive and negative aspects of social media use.

How important do you think social media use is for facilitating intercultural experiences and understanding among Erasmus/mobility students?

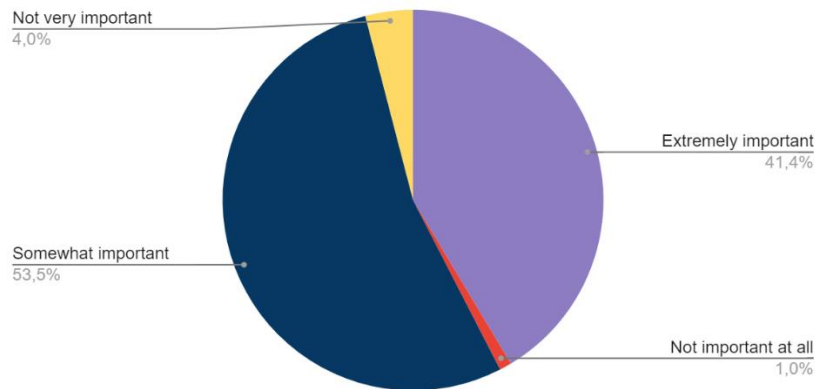


Figure 20- Graph on how important do the survey participants think social media use is for facilitating intercultural experiences and understanding among mobility students

Examining the data presented in the graph, it is evident that social media plays a significant role in facilitating intercultural experiences and understandings among Erasmus participants. A vast majority, 94.6% of participants, expressed that they find social media extremely (41.4%) or somewhat (53.5%) important in this regard.

This high percentage indicates the strong belief among participants that social media platforms contribute to fostering intercultural experiences and promoting cross cultural understanding. By providing a virtual space for interaction, exchange of ideas, and exposure to diverse perspectives, social media allows participants to engage with different cultures and gain a deeper understanding of them. The result is consistent with the transformative power of digital technology to lower barriers, link people from different origins, and foster cross-cultural interaction. By connecting with locals, other foreign students, and cultural lovers through social media platforms, Erasmus participants can foster significant cross-cultural connections and advance a global perspective.

Do you think that social media and the mobility program is important to develop professional relationships and networking?

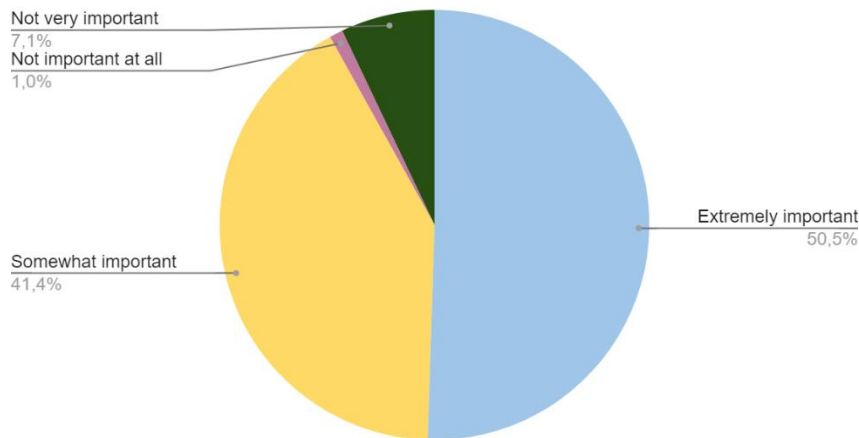


Figure 21- Graph on if the survey participants think social media and mobility program is important to develop professional relationships and networking

Investigating the data presented in this next graph, it is evident that participants perceive social media as a valuable platform not only for socializing but also for finding and developing professional relationships. The findings indicate that half of the participants view social media as an extremely important tool for both aspects.

Social media platforms provide participants with opportunities to connect with individuals from diverse professional backgrounds, exchange information, and expand their professional networks. The ability to share professional achievements, experiences, and interests on social media can attract potential employers, collaborators, or mentors. Furthermore, participants can join professional groups and communities on social media platforms, fostering meaningful connections and accessing valuable industry insights.

The recognition of social media as a platform for professional relationship building aligns with the evolving nature of networking and career development in the digital age. Social media allows individuals to showcase their skills, engage in industry related discussions, and discover new opportunities beyond traditional channels. The convenience and reach of social media platforms enable participants to connect with professionals worldwide, opening doors to international career prospects and cross-cultural collaborations.

Before/After arriving in the host country did you follow any Erasmus/Mobility organisation's social media (eg. ESN)?

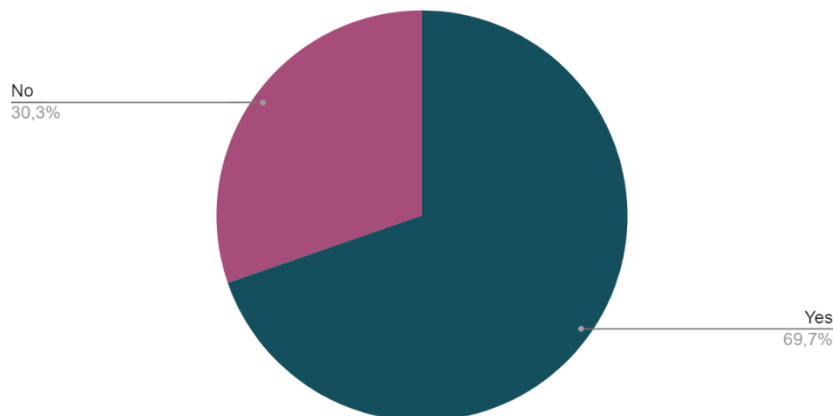


Figure 22- Graph on if before or after arriving in the host country did the survey participants follow any Mobility organisation's social media

Examining the data presented in the graph, it is evident that a significant majority of participants, 69.7%, have started following Erasmus organizations on social media either before or during mobility. This finding indicates that participants recognize the value of engaging with Erasmus-related content and staying connected with relevant organizations through social media platforms.

By following Erasmus organizations on social media, participants can stay updated on important announcements, events, and initiatives related to the program. It provides them with a channel to access valuable information, resources, and support throughout their Erasmus experience. Following these organizations also enables participants to connect with other Erasmus participants, fostering a sense of community and facilitating the sharing of experiences and tips. The decision to follow Erasmus organizations on social media reflects the participants' desire to remain connected to the broader Erasmus network and leverage the opportunities it offers. Social media platforms serve as a convenient and accessible means to stay informed and engaged, regardless of geographic location or time constraints. In addition to the benefits for individual participants, following Erasmus organizations on social media can also contribute to the visibility and reach of these organizations. It allows them to disseminate information, promote events, and engage with a broader audience, thereby fostering a stronger and more vibrant Erasmus community.

Have you used social media to find events and activities to participate in the host country?

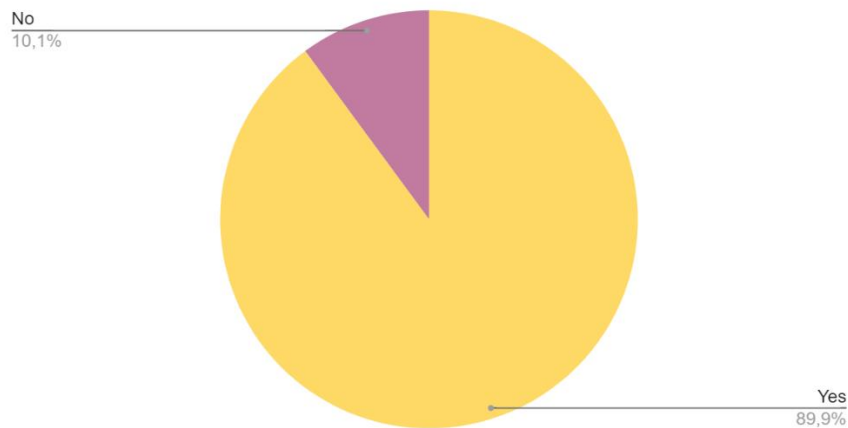


Figure 23- Graph on if the participants have used social media to find events and activities to participate in the host country

Analysing the data presented in the graph, it is evident that participants actively use social media to find events and activities to attend during their mobility period. The graph indicates that a significant majority of participants, 89.9%, rely on social media platforms to discover and stay informed about various events and activities.

By utilizing social media, participants can access a wide range of information regarding local events, cultural activities, and social gatherings happening in the host country. Following Erasmus organizations and other relevant accounts on social media provides them with real-time updates and notifications about upcoming events, ensuring they stay well-informed and have the opportunity to participate. The findings of this graph complement the data from the previous graph, as they highlight the participants' motivation to follow Erasmus organizations on social media to remain up to date with events and activities. By following these accounts, participants ensure they do not miss out on opportunities to engage with the local community, experience cultural events, and connect with other Erasmus participants.

Have you used social media to find accommodation in the host country?

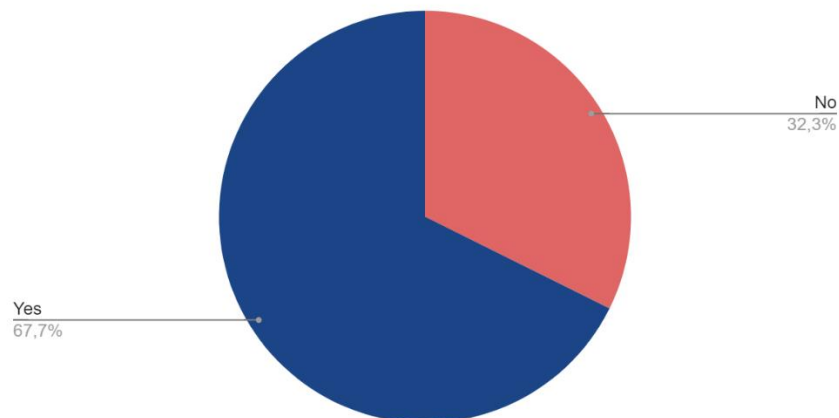


Figure 24- Graph on if the survey participants have used social media to find accommodation in the host country

In this graph, we can observe that social media serves as an efficient and popular tool for finding accommodation in the host country during the Erasmus experience. The data indicates that over 67.7% of participants have utilized social media platforms for this specific purpose. The high percentage of respondents relying on social media to secure accommodation highlights the convenience and effectiveness of these platforms in connecting individuals with housing options. Social media provides a convenient avenue for participants to search for available rooms, apartments, or shared housing arrangements, often through dedicated groups or pages related to housing in a specific location.

The use of social media for accommodation search during Erasmus offers several advantages. It allows participants to directly connect with potential landlords or roommates, inquire about available options, view photos, and gather information about the accommodation. Additionally, social media platforms enable participants to leverage their social networks by seeking recommendations or referrals from friends or acquaintances who may have relevant connections in the host country. The widespread adoption of social media for accommodation search aligns with the broader trend of digitalization and online platforms transforming various aspects of everyday life, including housing.

Have you used social media to learn a new language native to your host country?

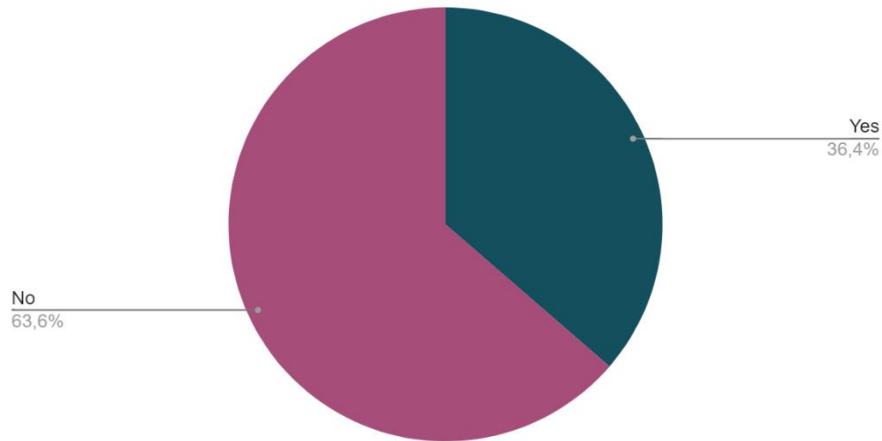


Figure 25- Graph on if the survey participants have used social media to learn a new language native to their host country

The purpose of this question was to explore whether social media can be utilized as a means to learn the language of the host country, considering its integral role in the country's culture. However, the results obtained were relatively divided, with a nearly equal distribution between those who used social media for language learning purposes and those who did not.

This split in the answers suggests that while some participants recognized the potential of social media as a language-learning tool, a significant number did not actively utilize it for this purpose. This variation in responses may be attributed to several factors, including individual preferences, access to language learning resources, and alternative methods of language acquisition. It is important to note that while social media platforms can offer language learning opportunities such as language exchange groups, educational content, and interactive discussions, they may not be the primary or preferred method for all participants. In conclusion, the results of this question indicate that the use of social media as a language learning tool during the Erasmus experience is not uniformly adopted by participants.

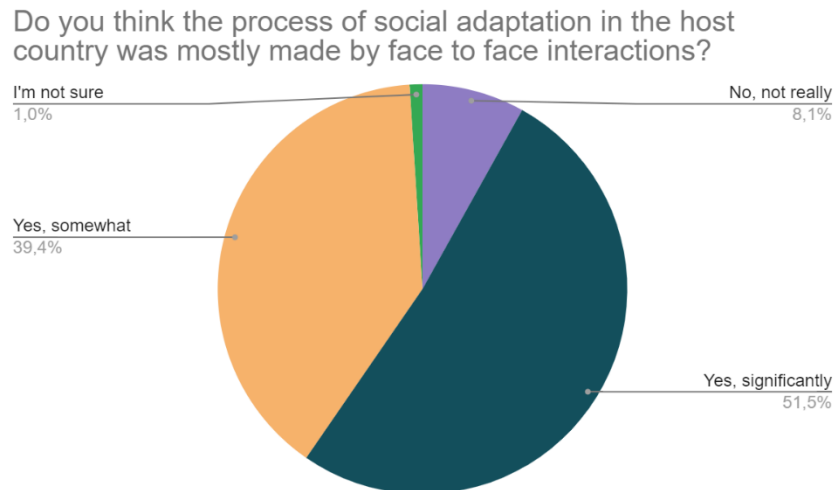


Figure 26- Graph on if the survey participants think the process of social adaptation in the host country was mostly made by face-to-face interactions

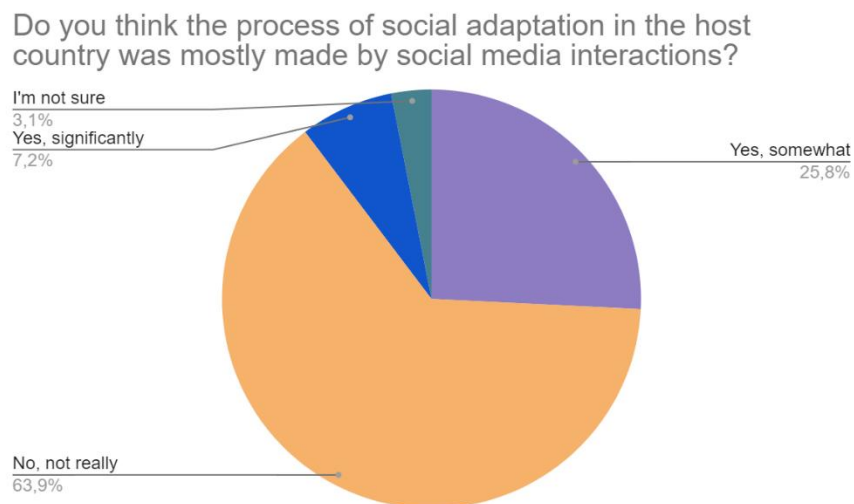


Figure 27- Graph on if the survey participants think the process of social adaptation in the host country was mostly made by social media interactions

To conclude, the data presented in these two graphs sheds light on the participants' preferred methods of social adaptation during the Erasmus experience. Firstly, when asked about the significance of face-to-face interactions in the social adaptation process, more than half of the participants indicated that it played a significant role, with an additional 39.4% stating that it was somewhat significant. This highlights the importance of personal interactions, physical presence, and direct communication in building social connections, forming friendships, and integrating into the local community.

In contrast, when asked about the use of social media for social adaptation, the majority of participants, more than 60%, responded negatively, indicating that social

media played a limited role in this aspect. Only a small percentage, around 25%, acknowledged somewhat using social media for social adaptation, and a mere 7.2% considered it a significant tool.

These findings suggest that while social media platforms are widely used throughout the Erasmus experience, participants still prioritize and predominantly rely on face-to-face interactions for social adaptation. The preference for direct human connection and the benefits derived from in-person interactions, such as non-verbal communication, cultural immersion, and a deeper sense of belonging, contribute to the participants' inclination towards face-to-face engagement.

However, it is important to acknowledge that social media can still complement the social adaptation process by providing opportunities for pre-arrival communication, information sharing, and initial connections. It can serve as a supplementary tool to facilitate initial introductions and pave the way for subsequent face-to-face interactions.

Discussion

To conclude the findings from this survey, the analysis of the various graphs provides valuable insights into the role of social media in the Erasmus experience and its impact on social adaptation, language learning, cultural understanding, and event discovery. The findings indicate that social media is widely used by participants emerging as a prominent aspect of the Erasmus experience, with a majority of respondents utilizing it as a primary means of communication and staying connected during their mobility period.

Regarding demographics, the survey showed a diverse range of participants showing a diverse range of nationalities highlighting the global appeal and inclusivity of the Erasmus program at ISCAP. The participants were also primarily between the ages of 19 and 38, with the majority being 23 years old. The gender distribution indicated higher participation of women, comprising 65.7% of the respondents. Furthermore, the participants represented a variety of nationalities, with Portuguese being the most prevalent, followed by French and Polish.

The graphs highlighted the significant role of social media in maintaining connections with home countries, as the majority of respondents used social media

multiple times a day to contact people from their home country. It also emerged as a popular tool for staying in touch with friends and family back home, with a clear preference for platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp.

While social media played a crucial role in connecting with people from the home country, the data indicated a slightly lower reliance on social media for maintaining relationships with people from the host country. Nevertheless, social media still facilitated interactions with the host country's culture, traditions, and language for a significant portion of the participants showing that they serve as valuable resources for exploring the traditions, customs, and cultural nuances of the host country.

The graphs also revealed that social media was perceived as an important medium for intercultural experiences and understanding. Participants acknowledged the impact of social media in increasing their awareness of cultural differences and appreciation for diverse cultures. While social media offers numerous benefits, it is not immune to challenges. Some participants reported encountering conflicts, misunderstandings, or negative impacts through social media usage. These challenges may arise due to cultural differences, language barriers, or misinterpretations of messages. However, the impact was minimal, suggesting that it generally fosters positive interactions and understanding.

Some questions proved inconclusive however, regarding language learning, for example, the findings were more divided, indicating that while some participants used social media as a tool for language acquisition, others did not actively engage in language learning activities through these platforms. This suggests that while social media can be utilized for language learning, it is not the primary method for all participants.

Lastly, in terms of social adaptation, face-to-face interactions were deemed significantly more important than social media. Participants valued personal connections and direct communication in their social adaptation process, emphasizing the role of in person interactions in building friendships and integrating into the local community.

Overall, the analysis of these graphs highlights the multifaceted role of social media in the Erasmus experience. While it serves as a vital communication tool, particularly for staying connected with people from the home country, its impact on social adaptation, language learning, and intercultural experiences is also significant. The findings underscore the wide use social media can have during mobility in various aspects of their day as a way to help and ease their intercultural process.

III – INTERVIEWS WITH ISCAP MOBILITY STUDENTS ABOUT THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING MOBILITY

Introduction

To gain a deeper understanding and analyse the topic of this thesis, three interviews were conducted with individuals, Subject A, Subject B and Subject C who participated in Erasmus programs in Spain, Japan, and France respectively. These interviews aimed to explore the specific use of social media during their mobility experiences. The questions asked were designed to delve further into their social media usage, examining the platforms they found most useful, how social media enhanced their overall experience, and its impact on maintaining connections with friends and family back home.

Additionally, the interviews aimed to understand how social media facilitated their integration into the local community. The participants were asked about their use of social media to connect with other students or people in their host country, whether they started using new social media platforms specific to the local culture, and how these interactions influenced their integration process.

By conducting these interviews, the thesis aimed to gather valuable first-hand insights and experiences from individuals who had undergone mobility experiences in different countries. The interviews provided a comprehensive exploration of the use of social media during mobility, contributing to a deeper understanding and analysis of the topic.

Interviews Analysis

1- For the first question of the interview, it was asked if they could give examples of specific social media platforms that have been particularly useful for them during their mobility and how did it enhance their experience. All three participants found specific social media platforms particularly useful during their mobility experiences. Subject A highlighted the significance of Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook. She mentioned that Instagram was a valuable platform for sharing her experiences with family and friends, allowing her to showcase the places she visited and the people she met. This enhanced her experience by enabling her to document and share memorable

moments. She also found Twitter useful as a way to stay updated with global events while using it as a mini diary to document her own experience. WhatsApp played a crucial role in keeping in contact with her family back home and the new friends she made. Additionally, WhatsApp groups created by Erasmus organizations in Salamanca helped her stay informed about events and parties happening in the city. Subject B also found Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook as great ways to connect with friends and family despite time differences. She also mentioned using Skype a lot to have her therapy sessions online.

On the other hand, Subject C specifically mentioned the significance of Facebook in her mobility experience. She relied on Facebook to search for housing, which Subject A also mentioned was extremely helpful for the same reason and integrate into the new environment. Through private groups, Subject C was able to explore various housing options and even meet people who were advertising their places. Facebook also served as a platform to discover events happening in the city, such as free stand-up comedy shows.

2- The second question, focused on how social media helped them maintain contact with friends and family back home while studying abroad and asked for examples of how this communication was important to them. All their experiences demonstrate how social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and LinkedIn, played essential roles in bridging the distance between them and their loved ones. Subject C on this question, mentioned that she rarely used Facebook, primarily utilizing it during the initial stages of her mobility journey to familiarize herself with the city. Instead, she relied heavily on WhatsApp for communication, including calls, video calls, and messages. Subject C also highlighted LinkedIn as her main social media platform, using it to reach out to the majority of her friends.

Subject A and Subject B acknowledged the crucial role of social media in maintaining connections with friends and family back home. Subject A specifically mentioned Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram as platforms that played a crucial role and utilized messaging, voice calls, and video chats on these platforms to stay in touch. She found that sharing updates and photos on social media helped her loved ones feel connected to her experiences. Subject B, as well as Subject A also highlighted the

significance of video calls on social media, enabling them to see their family's faces and minimizing the feeling of feeling alone in a new country.

3- For the 3rd question, it was asked if they had used social media to connect with other students or people in the host country and how it helped them integrate into the local community. It also asked to mention if they started using new social media during mobility. On this question, while Subject C mentioned the use of LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Twitter, Subject A predominantly relied on WhatsApp for connecting with fellow students and friends.

Subject C found LinkedIn to be crucial for fitting in during her mobility experience. She connected with her new colleagues and teachers on the platform, receiving valuable support and guidance. She also customized her LinkedIn profile in French to align with the preferences of the host country. WhatsApp and Twitter played significant roles in her integration, allowing her to exchange information, stay connected, participate in social events, and stay updated on news. Subject A relied heavily on WhatsApp to connect with other students and people in her host country. WhatsApp groups, especially those formed by Portuguese students in the Erasmus program, helped her build a sense of community and make friends. She also used WhatsApp for personal communication and arranging meetups with friends in the host country.

Subject B, who is doing her mobility in Asia, had to start using the Line app to fit into the community and to be able to communicate with people from her country of mobility. Since people there use different social media than the western side this was the perfect way to stay in touch with them and integrate.

4- The influence of social media on the perception of the host country or culture is the fourth question in addition to asking how it shaped their expectations or impacted their understanding of the local community. On one hand, Subject C's expectations of a glamorous Paris, shaped by social media and media portrayals, were challenged upon arrival as she discovered aspects that didn't match the stereotype. Subject B shared a similar sentiment to Subject C. She mentioned that she had seen a lot of videos on Instagram and TikTok about Japan, particularly regarding social norms and cultural codes. Her expectations were shaped by these social media portrayals. However, as time passed, she realized that not everything she had seen on social media was true. There

were misconceptions, wrong information, and romanticized portrayals that didn't reflect the reality she experienced.

However, in contrast, Subject A highlighted that social media played a significant role in shaping her perception of the host culture and country in a positive way exposing her to diverse perspectives and enriching her knowledge. While Subject C and Subject B's experience highlighted the disparity between expectations and reality, Subject A's experience showcased the positive impact of social media in expanding cultural understanding.

5- “How do you balance the use of social media for personal purposes versus academic or professional purposes during your mobility?” is the fifth question of the interview and, while Subject A found it relatively easy to balance the use of social media for personal and academic purposes during her mobility, Subject C and Subject B had a slightly different perspective.

Since Subject A primarily used WhatsApp for both personal and academic communication, being part of various class groups helped her stay updated on university work and address any academic doubts, however, Subject C defined boundaries for her social media accounts to maintain a balance between personal and professional use. She used WhatsApp to connect with family and friends, reserving it mostly for non-school or non-work times. However, due to feeling alone and missing someone, she occasionally sent texts during breaks. On the other hand, she used LinkedIn to stay connected with close friends and colleagues, as well as to keep up with school and work updates. Subject C acknowledged the difficulty in reconciling both personal and professional use of social media.

In addition, Subject B acknowledged that it can be challenging not to get carried away with social media use. She emphasized the importance of self-control and dedicating specific times of the day to academic purposes. By setting dedicated periods for academic engagement on social media, she aimed to maintain a balance between personal and academic use.

6- The sixth question centred around the challenges and drawbacks possibility encountered during mobility related to the use of social media. Subject B mentioned that one challenge she faced related to social media during her mobility was initially being more connected to people from Western countries rather than the host country. To

address this, she dedicated time to exploring the "Asian side" of social media and getting more involved in the local lifestyle.

In addition, Subject A acknowledged that while social media had numerous benefits, she encountered challenges and drawbacks as well. One specific challenge was the potential for excessive comparison and the fear of missing out (FOMO). Seeing others' exciting experiences on social media sometimes made her question if she was making the most of her mobility. In contrast, Subject C stated that she had not encountered any drawbacks related to the use of social media during her mobility.

7- The next question was if the participants had used social media to engage with local organizations, events, or initiatives during their mobility and how did this involvement enrich their experience. The respondents, all used social media to engage with local organizations, events, and initiatives during their mobility experiences.

Subject C utilized Facebook events, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn to discover activities, meet people from around the world, and expand her cultural knowledge. Similarly, Subject A followed Instagram pages and joined WhatsApp groups related to local organizations and events, connecting with both Erasmus students and locals which added depth and enrichment to her overall experience.

Subject B, like Subject A, used Instagram to stay informed about events in Tokyo, which allowed her to explore different aspects of the local community, try new foods, and meet new people. She felt that by utilizing social media, she was able to actively engage with the local scene and expand her horizons beyond what she might have otherwise experienced.

8- When asking if the interviewees thought social media could be leveraged to promote cross-cultural understanding and intercultural exchange among students during the mobility programs, there was a consensus that the respondents believe that social media provides a powerful tool for students to foster cross-cultural understanding, break down barriers, and build meaningful connections.

Subject C emphasizes that social media can serve as a platform to debunk cultural differences and create a common ground for better understanding. She shares how sharing jokes and humour through social media helps bridge the gap between her Portuguese background and the French culture she is currently immersed in. Subject A

highlights the importance of platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp, where students from diverse backgrounds can share their experiences, ask questions, and engage in discussions to learn about different cultures and dismiss stereotypes. Subject B points out that sharing daily experiences on social media creates engagement and connection with others in similar situations, and she has used social media to stay in touch with other European students in Tokyo, allowing them to share experiences and bond over their shared mobility experiences.

9- On this question, the participants, Subjects A, B, and C discussed the negative effects of social media on students' mobility experiences. Subject A highlighted the fear of missing out (FOMO) as a key issue, indicating that the pressure to attend every event seen on social media caused her anxiety and a sense of obligation, even when rest or personal preferences were overlooked. Subject C shared similar concerns, explaining that students in mobility programs constantly strive to enhance their experiences and may feel anxious about not being involved in enough activities. Additionally, they mentioned the tendency to feel inadequate when comparing their own experiences to curated, idealized social media posts of the same events.

Both Subjects A and C suggested solutions to mitigate these negative effects. They stressed the importance of personal awareness and education, recommending taking breaks from social media and recognizing that the online content often doesn't accurately represent reality. Encouraging a more mindful approach to social media usage was seen as a way to establish a healthier relationship with these platforms.

Subject B, who is currently studying in Japan, echoed Subjects A and C's concerns about FOMO and the pressure to share every aspect of mobility experiences on social media. Subject B emphasized how this pressure could stem from a desire to project a perfect image of their experience and prove their worth to their online audience. This unrealistic standard can lead to students overextending themselves and negatively affecting their overall mobility experience.

10- On one of the last questions, it was asked if the participants had observed any differences in social media usage and behaviour between students from different countries or cultural backgrounds during their mobility and if yes, if they could elaborate on those differences.

Subject C noted that, in her experience, the cultural aspect of a country does not have a significant impact on social media usage. Instead, she highlighted the generational aspect as the main influencer. According to her observations, individuals from different countries, such as Germany, France, Poland, and the Netherlands, tend to have a similar approach to social media. However, younger generations place greater importance on platforms like TikTok, seeking a stronger online presence, oversharing, and even experiencing a sense of dependency on their phones. Subject C highlighted the stark contrast between her ability to go days without using her phone and her younger friends who feel uneasy without constant access to their devices.

On the other hand, Subject A identified differences in social media usage between countries. She mentioned that Snapchat was widely used by French and English individuals, while Portuguese users tended to favour other platforms. Moreover, Subject A highlighted the influence of age groups, with younger Erasmus participants heavily utilizing TikTok and the emerging platform BeReal, which gained popularity among Generation Z. Meanwhile, older students tended to lean towards Facebook and Instagram.

Subject B provided a contrasting perspective, stating that cultural differences in social media usage were noticeable, particularly in Asia. She described people in Asia as extremely obsessed with their phones, often being constantly engaged with their devices, and rarely interacting with each other. She also noted a preference for platforms like Twitter over Instagram and Facebook in Asian countries.

These insights demonstrate the interplay between cultural and generational factors in shaping social media preferences and usage patterns. While cultural differences may influence the choice of platforms, generational disparities seem to have a more pronounced impact on the intensity of usage, preferred features, and emotional attachment to social media.

11- “Did you consume any content, either on TikTok or Instagram Reels, related to the culture and customs of a country, especially your host country, either before or during your Erasmus experience? If yes, did you follow specific influencers who create such content?” was the second to last question, and both Subject A and Subject B had different approaches to Subject C when it came to consuming content related to the culture and customs of their host countries during their Erasmus experiences.

Subject A expressed a strong interest in exploring different countries' cultures even before her Erasmus program. She actively consumed content on TikTok and Instagram Reels, specifically focusing on Spanish culture, language, and traditions during her time in Spain. Subject A found it educational and entertaining to watch influencers comparing Portuguese and Spanish cultures. By engaging with this content, she felt better prepared for her Erasmus experience and deepened her understanding and appreciation of Spain throughout her stay. Subject B also engaged with Japanese content before and after going to Japan and followed specific influencers on both TikTok and Instagram.

On the other hand, Subject C had a different perspective. She didn't have TikTok and didn't follow influencers. However, she did follow travel pages on Instagram that showcased landscapes, which sometimes led to suggested content from different locations on Reels. Before she arrived in Paris, she used Instagram to search for hashtags like #Paris and places she wanted to visit. However, after being in Paris for over six months, she found herself relying more on personal references rather than social media. Subject C mentioned feeling somewhat dissatisfied with the expectations Instagram creates and preferred to rely on her own experiences and connections.

12- Lastly, it was asked if the interviewees had anything to add all subjects shared positive perspectives on the impact of social media during their mobility experiences. Subject C highlighted the significance of social media as a tool for creating a "public" scrapbook of collective memories during her Erasmus experiences. She mentioned the sentimental value of revisiting shared content, allowing her to relive delightful moments. Despite using Facebook less frequently now, she still appreciates having all the posts aggregated to her account, providing a nostalgic outlet whenever she longs for those times.

Subject A emphasized the positive impact of social media on her mobility experience. It helped her stay connected with loved ones, establish connections with fellow students and the local community, and store cherished memories. Both Subject C and Subject A recognized how social media facilitated connection, and memory preservation, and enriched their overall mobility experiences. They were able to maintain relationships, engage with new acquaintances, and create enduring memories of their time abroad.

Subject B contributed a different angle, noting the interesting observation of how different cultures use social media and the internet daily. She specifically highlighted that people in Japan and Asia are more addicted to phones and social media compared to Western cultures. Additionally, she found it intriguing that Japanese users consume a significant amount of foreign content on social media, even if it is translated.

Overall, these responses collectively emphasize the positive impact of social media in the context of mobility experiences. They highlight its role in fostering connections, preserving memories, and facilitating cultural exploration. While Subject A focused on the broader benefits, Subject C shared her personal experience of using social media as a nostalgic archive, and Subject B highlighted the cultural nuances in social media usage, particularly in Japan and Asia.

Discussion

The interviewees expressed their thoughts on using social media while participating in mobility programmes, as well as their own experiences with it. In general, social networking sites greatly improved their mobility experiences, helped them stay in touch with friends and family, made it easier for them to integrate into the community, shaped how they perceived the host culture, and encouraged intercultural understanding. However, they also highlighted several difficulties and disadvantages related to social media use, such as the possibility of excessive comparison and the fear of losing out.

The participants found specific social media platforms particularly useful during their mobility experiences. Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook were mentioned as valuable platforms for sharing experiences, staying updated with global events, documenting memorable moments, and staying in touch with loved ones. LinkedIn was also highlighted as a platform for professional connections and engagement. The influence of social media on the perception of the host country or culture varied among the participants. Some mentioned that social media had shaped their expectations and provided diverse perspectives, while others noted that it sometimes led to misconceptions and romanticized portrayals that didn't align with the reality they experienced.

The participants engaged with local organizations, events, and initiatives through social media, which enriched their experiences and allowed them to connect with people from different backgrounds. They believed that social media could be leveraged to promote cross-cultural understanding and intercultural exchange among students during mobility programs. The participants also consumed content related to the culture and customs of their host countries through platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels, as well as travel pages on Instagram. This content helped them prepare for their mobility experiences and deepen their understanding of the host culture.

However, the negative effects of social media during mobility were also discussed, including the fear of missing out and the pressure to enhance experiences. The participants suggested personal awareness, taking breaks from social media, and recognizing the curated nature of content as ways to mitigate these negative effects.

In addition, differences in social media usage and behaviours were observed between students from different countries or cultural backgrounds. Generational factors were highlighted as influential, with younger generations showing a stronger online presence and dependency on social media platforms. Cultural differences also played a role in platform preferences and intensity of usage.

In summary, social media had both positive and negative impacts on the participants' mobility experiences. It facilitated connections, maintained relationships, promoted cross-cultural understanding, and enriched their overall experiences. However, challenges such as the fear of missing out and the pressure to enhance experiences also arose. The participants recognized the importance of maintaining a balanced and mindful approach to social media use during mobility programs.

The intersection of social media and intercultural communication presents both opportunities and challenges. Social media has transformed communication, fostering global interconnectedness and intercultural exchange. It offers numerous benefits, including connectivity, education, business opportunities, and many more. By enabling user generated content, online communication, and networking, social media platforms have become Internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of masspersonal communication. These platforms enable user interactions and primarily rely on user generated content to create value. Through features such as posts, comments, and shares, social media users can actively participate in conversations, share their experiences, and contribute to intercultural understanding.

Intercultural communication plays a vital role in understanding cultural differences and facilitating effective interactions, requiring intercultural competencies such as self-reflection, empathy, cultural sensitivity, and openness. Successful intercultural communication contributes to personal and professional development, promotes diversity acceptance, and enhances global business practices. In the end, the intercultural approach seeks to promote communication, exchange, and reciprocal understanding among people from various cultural backgrounds, emphasising the crucial role that communication plays in attaining these goals and the critical role that social media plays in aiding this process.

However, it is important to acknowledge the challenges associated with social media in the context of intercultural communication. These challenges include the dissemination of personal information that hampers constructive relationships. Despite these challenges, the impact of social media on intercultural communication and education is significant, enabling individuals to connect and interact across cultures, expanding their understanding and perspectives.

The findings from the survey on the role of social media in the Erasmus experience for ISCAP students provide valuable insights. Social media emerges as a prominent aspect of the Erasmus experience, with participants utilizing it as a primary means of communication and staying connected during their mobility period. Based on the survey conducted, it appears that even the traditional messaging option on mobile

phones has undergone a significant shift, with social media apps like WhatsApp emerging as popular alternatives. This can be attributed to various factors such as an offer for a wide range of features beyond basic messaging, such as voice and video calls, file sharing, group chats, and the ability to share multimedia content. These features play a crucial role in maintaining connections with home countries and staying in touch with friends and family back home.

The preference for platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp indicates that visual content and instant messaging play a crucial role in keeping relationships alive and bridging geographical distances. In addition to the dominance of established social media apps like WhatsApp, the survey also shed light on the emergence of newer platforms catering to the desire for real-time content. One such example is BeReal, which promotes the sharing of content as it happens, in the present moment. This indicates a growing preference among users for immediate and authentic experiences similar to the “history” option on Instagram that documents and shares real life moments which further underscores the shift towards more genuine and timely content in social media usage.

Additionally, on the survey we saw that social media facilitates interactions with the host country's culture, traditions, and language, enhancing intercultural experiences and understanding. Participants reported using social media to discover local events, learn about traditions and customs, and navigate the nuances of the host country's language. This highlights the power of social media in facilitating intercultural experiences and promoting cultural awareness.

Social media has many advantages, but it also has drawbacks. Cultural disparities, language hurdles, or misinterpretations of messages can lead to conflicts, misunderstandings, or harmful effects. The overall effect of these difficulties, however, seems to be minor, indicating that social media generally promotes wholesome connections and comprehension.

The survey results also indicate that while social media can be utilized for language learning, it is not the primary method for all participants. Face-to-face interactions were deemed significantly more important for social adaptation, emphasizing the role of in-person connections in building friendships and integrating into the local community.

While social media plays a significant role in intercultural communication, it is essential to recognize that face-to-face interactions remain crucial for social adaptation. Participants emphasized the importance of personal connections and direct communication in building friendships and integrating into the local community. This suggests that while social media enhances intercultural experiences, it should complement, rather than replace, in-person interactions.

In addition, both the survey and interviews revealed that Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook were the most commonly used social media platforms during Erasmus/mobility programs for staying in touch and preserving memories. While these platforms were widely used according to the survey and two interviewees, one interviewee pointed out that in Asia, Line App was more commonly used as a substitute for these social media platforms. This difference made her feel more connected to the Western side rather than the Asian side, and she recognized the need to change that to fit in more. It was also mentioned in the interviews that social media usage may vary depending on the country or generation. Some participants noted that younger people tend to use TikTok more and Facebook less compared with people from an older generation. Additionally, the interviewee in Tokyo observed that Asians seemed to be more addicted to social media than Westerners and used Twitter more frequently instead of Instagram. This illustrates that social media can be both socially connected and constantly evolving.

Apart from staying in touch and storing memories, the uses of these social media platforms varied. The interviews highlighted that participants used social media to engage with organizations and discover events. This finding aligns with the survey results, which indicated that nearly 70% of respondents followed Erasmus/Mobility organizations in their host country, and almost 90% used social media to find events. Furthermore, when comparing the interviews to the survey, there was a consensus that social media can promote cross-cultural understanding. The interviews mentioned using social media to debunk cultural differences, share diverse experiences, and participate in discussions. The survey also showed that over 90% of respondents believed social media facilitated this process to a great extent. Social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Reels were mentioned in the interviews as mediums for consuming cultural content, which correlates with the 92% of survey respondents who reported using social media to explore the culture and traditions of their host country. Moreover, social media's

impact extends beyond personal connections. One interviewee mentioned using LinkedIn for professional networking, and the survey revealed that 50% of respondents found social media to be extremely important for developing professional relationships, while 40% considered it somewhat important.

However, despite the numerous benefits of social media, there are also negative aspects and overall negative impacts. The addictive nature of social media was mentioned in the interviews and confirmed by the majority of survey participants who reported using social media multiple times a day. Additionally, as mentioned in the interviews, social media can influence people's perceptions negatively promoting stereotypes and spreading wrong information. Finally, the concept of FOMO (fear of missing out) was raised as a drawback of social media in the interviews. The interviewees expressed feeling left out or as if they had not fully enjoyed an experience because social media often showcases the best moments, creating unrealistic expectations and potentially damaging one's mental health.

In conclusion, there are advantages and disadvantages to the way social media and interculturalism interact. Social media has had a huge impact on communication, increasing interconnection and cross-cultural dialogue on a worldwide scale. In addition to facilitating user-generated content, online communication, and networking, it offers a wide range of advantages, including connectivity, education, business prospects, and more. By enabling users to actively engage in conversations, exchange experiences, and advance intercultural understanding, this has transformed social media platforms into persistent, disentangled conduits of masspersonal communication. Understanding cultural differences involves the ability to communicate across cultures, which calls for qualities like empathy and cultural sensitivity. Improved worldwide business practises, professional and personal growth and acceptance of diversity are all results of effective intercultural communication. The survey results on how social media affects ISCAP students' Erasmus experiences offer insightful information and demonstrate how important social media is for maintaining connections while on the move. Social media can improve cross-cultural contacts and cultural knowledge, but it shouldn't take the place of face-to-face encounters. Social media has advantages, but it also has disadvantages, including addictive behaviours, the dissemination of false information, and the detrimental effects of FOMO on mental health. Overall, social media is essential for

fostering cross-cultural understanding, but to reap the full benefits, it must be used responsibly.

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Appendix I – Survey questions

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Nationality
4. Country of mobility
5. When did you do Erasmus?
6. How often have you used social media platforms while studying abroad as an Erasmus/ mobility student?
7. What methods have you used to contact people from your home country while on Erasmus/Mobility?
8. How important do you think social media use is for staying connected with friends and family back home?
9. What methods have you used to contact people from your host country?
10. How important do you think social media use is for staying connected with other international students or locals in your host country?
11. What social media have you used the most while on Erasmus/Mobility?
12. Have you started using new social media while on Erasmus?
13. If you answered yes to the previous question say which ones
14. Have you made new friends or connections with locals or other international students through social media while studying abroad as an Erasmus/ mobility student?
15. Have you encountered any cultural misunderstandings or conflicts through social media interactions while studying abroad as an Erasmus/mobility student?
16. Have you used social media to explore and get to know your host country's culture and traditions?
17. Do you think social media use has helped you to become more aware of cultural differences while studying abroad as an Erasmus/mobility student?
18. Do you think social media use has helped you to better understand and appreciate different cultures while studying abroad as an Erasmus/mobility student?
19. Do you think social media use has had any negative impacts on your intercultural experiences while studying abroad as an Erasmus/mobility student?

20. How important do you think social media use is for facilitating intercultural experiences and understanding among Erasmus/mobility students?
21. Do you think that social media and the mobility program is important to develop professional relationships and networking?
22. Before/After arriving in the host country did you follow any Erasmus/Mobility organisation's social media (eg. ESN)?
23. Have you used social media to find events and activities to participate in the host country?
24. Have you used social media to find accommodation in the host country?
25. Have you used social media to learn a new language native to your host country?
26. Do you think the process of social adaptation in the host country was mostly made by face-to-face interactions?
27. Do you think the process of social adaptation in the host country was mostly made by social media interactions?
28. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with social media use and interculturality while studying abroad as an Erasmus/mobility student?

Appendix II – Interview Questions

1. Can you give examples of specific social media platforms that have been particularly useful for you during your mobility? How did they enhance your experience?
2. How has social media helped you maintain connections with friends and family back home while you are abroad? Can you provide examples of how this communication has been valuable to you?
3. In what ways have you used social media to connect with other students or people in your host country? How did this help you integrate into the local community, and did you start using new social media?
4. How does social media influence your perception of the host culture or country? Has it shaped your expectations or impacted your understanding of the local community?
5. How do you balance the use of social media for personal purposes versus academic or professional purposes during your mobility?

6. Have you encountered any challenges or drawbacks related to the use of social media during your mobility? If so, can you explain them and how you addressed them?
7. Have you used social media to engage with local organizations, events, or initiatives during your mobility? How did this involvement enrich your experience?
8. How do you think social media can be leveraged to promote cross-cultural understanding and intercultural exchange among students during mobility programs?
9. Do you believe that social media has any negative effects on students' overall mobility experience? If so, what are they, and how can they be mitigated?
10. Have you observed any differences in social media usage and behaviour between students from different countries or cultural backgrounds during your mobility? If yes, can you elaborate on those differences?
11. Did you consume any content, either on TikTok or Instagram Reels, related to the culture and customs of a country, especially your host country, either before or during your Erasmus experience? If yes, did you follow specific influencers who create such content?
12. Anything else you want to add?

Appendix III – Subject A Interview Answers

1. During my mobility, I found several social media platforms particularly useful. Instagram allowed me to share with my family and friends the places I visited and the people I met. It enhanced my experience by enabling me to document and share memorable moments. I also used Twitter as well since it was a good way to know what was going on in the world as well as document my experience like a mini diary. Additionally, Whatsapp is an app I used a lot since it was a great way to keep in contact with my family back home and the new friends I made. Whatsapp groups with Erasmus students made by organizations in Salamanca also helped immensely to keep me updated with the events and parties happening. Lastly, Facebook was also a big help in the beginning to find accommodation.

2. Social media played a crucial role in maintaining connections with friends and family back home while I was abroad. Platforms like Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram

allowed me to stay in touch through messaging, voice calls, and video chats. Sharing updates and photos on social media helped them feel connected to my experiences and the possibility to do videocalls on WhatsApp where we could see each other's faces helped me not miss them so much.

3. To connect with other students or people in my host country, I utilized mostly WhatsApp. As I mentioned before, WhatsApp groups were great to feel connected to the Erasmus community and keep me updated with what was going on in the city. One of the groups I was in was a group of Portuguese students doing Erasmus there and I met lots of friends there which helped me feel at home. Whatsapp was also used among me and my friends there to keep in touch and schedule meetups.

4. Social media certainly influenced my perception of the host culture and country. Through social media, I was exposed to various perspectives, cultural insights, and experiences shared by locals and other travellers. It allowed me to learn about the local customs, traditions, and landmarks, shaping my expectations and broadening my understanding of the local community.

5. I honestly don't think I found any difficulty balancing it since I mostly just used WhatsApp for both personal and academic purposes I was also part of groups for various classes I had which kept me updated on the university work and helped with any doubts I had.

6. While social media brought numerous benefits, I did encounter some challenges and drawbacks. One challenge was the potential for excessive comparison and FOMO (fear of missing out). Seeing others' exciting experiences on social media sometimes made me question if I was making the most of my mobility. To address this, I reminded myself that social media presents a highlight reel, and everyone's experiences are unique.

7. Yes, I used social media to engage with local organizations, events, and initiatives during my mobility. I followed Instagram pages and joined whatsapp groups related to local cultural organizations and events. This involvement enriched my experience by allowing me to connect with not only other Erasmus students but also locals.

8. Social media can be a powerful tool to promote cross-cultural understanding. If used properly, platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp where students from diverse backgrounds share their experiences, ask questions and engage in discussions are very

important. By actively participating in these conversations, students can learn about different cultures, dismiss stereotypes, and understand each other more.

9. One of the negative effects I can think of is one that I talked about before which is the fear of missing out. Seeing other people schedule meet-ups and parties always made me feel like I should go to all of them since many people I knew were also going even though sometimes I felt like staying home to rest.

10. One of the few differences I found that differed from country to country is the different social media used. A lot of French and English people for example used Snapchat a lot which a lot of Portuguese for example don't use. However, I also saw a difference in usage between age groups. A lot of younger Erasmus used tiktok a lot and a new social media called BeReal which became very popular recently among gen Z. Some older students used Facebook more and Instagram.

11. Before Erasmus I already saw on TikTok various content talking about different countries cultures since I love to travel and learn about new places. However, close to and during my Erasmus experience in Spain, I actively consumed content on TikTok and Instagram Reels related to the culture and customs of the country. I followed specific influencers who created content about Spanish culture, language, and traditions. Sometimes I saw influencers comparing Portuguese culture and Spanish culture and it was always entertaining and educational. In addition, their videos provided valuable insights into festivals, traditional dishes, and local customs. Engaging with this content helped me prepare for my Erasmus experience and deepen my understanding and appreciation of Spain throughout my stay.

12. Overall, social media played a significant role in enhancing my mobility experience. It helped me stay connected with loved ones, connect with other students and the local community, and gain valuable cultural insights. It's also a great way to store memories from my experience that I can easily look back and enjoy.

Appendix IV – Subject B Interview Answers

1. Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook allowed me to stay in contact with my friends and family, despite the distance and time differences - it made it easier to be "alone". Skype was also a tool I used a lot - to have therapy sessions online.

2. Like I stated before, social media helped me keep in touch with family and friends in a very easy, fast way. I was able to video-call them, send messages, videos and photos of what I've done, among many other things. If it wasn't for social media, I think that I'd be very lonely during my time abroad.
3. In Asia, people use a lot the Line app. So, to fit into the community and to be able to communicate with others, I started using it. It is the Asian version of WhatsApp, so I mainly used to chat with other people. It allowed me to communicate with them, even when they did not have other types of social media that us westerners are used to.
4. I used to see a lot of videos about Japan on Instagram and TikTok, specially on what concerns social norms and cultural codes. So, I went to Japan expecting this things and already counting on what I would have to go through. But the truth is, as time went by, I realized that not everything I saw on social media was true. There is a lot of wrong information, misconceptions, and romanticization.
5. It is hard not to get lost in social media when using it - I think it requires a lot of selfcontrol to be able to use social media for academic reasons. Still, it was a matter of dedicating specific times of my day to those specific purposes.
6. Not really. The only thing that might have been a small issue was my lack of contact with people from the host country on Social media. Meaning that, at first, when using social media, all news, trends, and people, were still Western - I had to dedicate some time to exploring the "Asian side" of social media, to get more involved in the local lifestyle.
7. I used Instagram to check on events and celebrations that were happening in Tokyo almost every week. It allowed me to get to know what was happening around Tokyo and resulted in me going to a series of different events/celebrations/etc. This knowledge of what was happening around Tokyo allowed me to also engage more with the local community and culture - it allowed me to try new foods, meet new people, and get to know different parts of the country (that otherwise I probably wouldn't have visited)
8. Posting what we do on a daily basis when abroad always gives rise to engagement from others who are experiencing the same. Also, when in mobility, I met other European

students in mobility in Tokyo. Social media allowed us to keep in touch, share experiences, and bond over our situation.

9. Yes, I do believe social media can have some negative effects! The fear of missing out (FOMO) is a significant concern, as the pressure to attend every event shared online can be overwhelming as well as seeing friends and family back home going to do things that I can't. This also forces students to constantly post their activities to prove they are having a great time, which can be pressuring

10. Yes, a lot. People in Asia are extremely obsessed with their phones. And I mean it. Nothing compared to Europe. In Japan people were constantly on their phones, never looking up, almost never interacting with one another. Also, there's a huge difference in social media usage - people in Asia do not use Instagram very much, nor Facebook. Rather, they prefer Twitter.

11. Yes, I engaged with content related to Japanese culture and customs both before and during my Erasmus experience in Japan. I followed specific influencers on platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels who provided insights into various aspects of Japanese life, including cultural customs, traditions, food, and festivals. This content was valuable in preparing for my time in Japan and continued to enrich my cultural immersion throughout my study abroad experience.

12. It was very interesting to see how different cultures use social media and the internet daily. I'd say that people in Japan / Asia are way more addicted to phones and social media when compared to Western cultures. Fun enough, from my experience, Japanese users consume a lot of foreign content on social media (although almost always translated)

Appendix V – Subject C Interview Answers

1- When I arrived, Facebook was essential to look for a house and fitting in. Finding an accommodation here is pretty tough so I was trying to rent a room through private groups. I ended up visiting some houses and meeting some of the people advertising their places in there. Facebook also helped me discover events happening around the city, like free stand-up comedy shows.

- 2- To be honest, I rarely use Facebook, used it in the beginning just to better accommodate myself in the city. In order to be in touch with my friends and family, I use Whatsapp mostly, for calls, videocalls and messages. Very rarely I use Instagram, I am more of a private person. But a friend of mine has posted pictures of me which helps my mom find out that I am ok! Apart from this, my main social media is LinkedIn and through there I reach out to the majority of my friends.
- 3- In order to fit in more, I use LinkedIn mostly. I befriended my new colleagues and teachers that helped me on adapting to this new reality. I have also looked for a job and the recruitment process in France is very different from what I am used to. Therefore, I adjusted my content according to the preferences of France (such as, for example, creating a profile totally in French, while in Portugal I only had it in English). Whatsapp is another social media that I use even at the university as there is a group created by the students also with the professors in so we can exchange information. And, as I live in a students' residence, I integrated another Whatsapp group to better help me fit in, make friends and learn the news happening in the town. Sometimes, parties are organized through this group. I also use Twitter, to check out the news of the country, the politics (most importantly, the strikes and when they are happening), and issues with the transports (if a train line is having perturbations, usually the company posts on Twitter almost immediately and so I can better adjust my path).
- 4- To be honest, I think that before arriving I had a glamorous idea of Paris mostly thanks to Instagram. Before I arrived, I was under the impression that Paris was a very chic city, filled with important beautiful people, and that people would eat croissants, baguettes and macarons for breakfast. I can say that I was a little bit influenced by the stereotypes portrayed on social media (or even in Emily in Paris). But the fact is that most
- 5- Parisians are very rude (especially in the transports), the city is dirty and no, they don't eat croissant for breakfast every day! Of course, there are glamorous parts in the city and wonderful people (I made a lot of friends), but not all of the places are like that. But the notion that I had of what would be the routine of the city, my expectations, turned out not to match the reality.
- 6- Well, I define the boundaries of my accounts on social media. For instance, if I am aiming to talk to my family and friends, I reach out to Whatsapp, which I mostly do

when I am not at school or at work. Nonetheless, as I am here alone and I am missing someone, whenever I have a pause, sometimes I send a little text. Nonetheless, throughout the day I use LinkedIn to check upon some closest friends and colleagues, to know what is happening at the school and at work. I try to conciliate both but it is hard.

- 7- So far, nothing, no drawbacks.
- 8- Like I said, I have used Facebook events, Whatsapp and LinkedIn to find out activities happening around town. This allowed me to meet new people from different parts of the world, contributing to my cultural knowledge. But the most enriching part is the wonderful memories that I created and the spectacular friends that I made.
- 9- I think that social media can be a tool to debunk the culture that we are going to live in and a common ground to start, to get to know better the people. For instance, I can give an example of mine. I usually make jokes and I have noticed that a lot of times, people in here don't understand them, only the ones that are in touch with the international scene. The French humour is a little bit different than mine, and right now, when sometimes I watch videos of French comedians shared by my French colleagues mostly through Whatsapp groups, I can understand better their sense of humor and how they deliver the punchlines. From there, I can always give an input, a reference, from Portugal and it is a perfect way to share and understand both cultures.
- 10- I do believe that social media can have a negative impact in terms of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). People that are in mobility are trying to get the most out of their experiences and therefore are always looking for ways on how to improve them. This effect can either be afraid of not being involved in enough activities, or not being part of others redeemed "important". Then, also when they see pictures in social media, maybe of the same even that they attended, they can feel that they didn't have "enough fun" as others portrayed in their posts. I do not have a definite way on how to mitigate this but I would suggest that a personal approach should be taken. Now more than ever, people should be "educated" on how to use social media and be aware of the mental toll it can take on a person. It is important to take some time off and always keep in mind that what is shown is not an accurate image of the reality.

- 11- Personally, I cannot say I have. I wouldn't say it is the culture from a country that totally influences the usage and behaviour of social media but mostly the generational aspect. In my experience, I feel like the majority of the people that I deal with have a somewhat similar approach to social media as I do, even if they are from Germany, France, Poland, Holland, etc... Nevertheless, the younger generations give a more importance to TikTok, for instance, to have a stronger presence on social media, to overshare, and they are afraid of not being online. It is hard to explain but while in my case I can go days without touching my phone, I encountered several younger friends that feel "sick" if they don't have their phones nearby.
- 12- TikTok I don't have or want to have so it's a social network I can't talk about. I don't follow influencers, however, since I follow a few travel pages that showcase landscapes, I usually have suggested content from different locations on the reels. Before I came to Paris I remember searching the hashtag #Paris to see what was being posted, as well as places I then wanted to visit. But now that I've been here for over 6 months, I don't use it as much anymore, I prefer to have personal references because, as I said before, I got a little displeased with the expectations that Instagram creates and the reality
- 13- I wanted to just say that social media is a great way of creating a "public" scrapbook of collective memories of an experience when you are abroad. It's like the friend's shared content that we can revisit later and relive those delicious memories. This is my third time doing Erasmus exactly because of that first feeling that I got. My first experience was magical and even though right now I use less Facebook, I have all the posts still aggregated to my account so whenever I feel "saudade" of that time, I open my page and browse through those posts, pictures and comments.