The Role of Social Media on Communication, Integration and Adaptation of International Students in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The research titled "The role of social media on communication, integration, and adaptation of international students in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) during the COVID-19 pandemic" was conducted by a mixed-methodology involving a questionnaire based survey and a focus group interview with 313 and 10 international students respectively from various universities in TRNC. The study aimed to explore how social media facilitated communication, cohesion, and adaptation among international students from diverse cultural backgrounds during the pandemic.

The findings of the study revealed several key points. The primal being language barrier which posed significant challenges for incoming students, particularly those unfamiliar with Turkish. However, one participant's proactive use of social media for learning Turkish before arrival highlighted its potential in bridging language gaps. The pandemic disrupted traditional forms of communication, pushing students to rely on social media for cross-cultural interactions. Translation services on social media platforms and Google search engine helped in facilitating effective communication among individuals with diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Social media played a vital role in addressing integration and intercultural adaptation challenges. It helped combat stereotypes, educate students about local customs, and eased the adjustment process, particularly when students made preparations using social media before their arrival. Social media platforms not only facilitated

communication but also nurtured social connections, helping students feel more at home in the TRNC.

The study emphasized the effectiveness of social media as a primary source of communication during crises situations like the pandemic. It broke down language barriers, helped in the dissemination of accurate information, and played a crucial role in students' adaptation and integration. In summary, this research underscores the invaluable role of social media in addressing communication, integration, and intercultural adaptation challenges faced by international students during the COVID-19 pandemic in the TRNC.

Keywords: Social Media, Crisis Communication, Integration, Intercultural Adaptation, Uses and Gratifications Theory.

ÖZ

"COVID-19 pandemisi sırasında Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti'nde (KKTC) yaşayan uluslararası öğrencilerin iletişim, bütünleşme ve uyum süreçlerinde sosyal medyanın rolü"nü irdeleyen bu çalışma, KKTC'deki çeşitli üniversitelerde okuyan 313 uluslararası öğrenci ile anketler ve odak grubu görüşmeleri içeren karma bir yöntemle gerçekleştirildi. Çalışma, pandemi sırasında farklı kültürel geçmişlere sahip uluslararası öğrenciler arasındaki iletişimin, adaptasyon ve uyumun nasıl kolaylaştırıldığını araştırmayı amaçladı.

Araştırmanın bulguları birkaç önemli noktayı ortaya koydu. İlk olarak, gelen öğrenciler için Türkçe'yi bilmeyenler dahil olmak üzere dil engelleri önemli zorluklar oluşturdu. Ancak, bir katılımcının buraya gelmeden önce Türkçe öğrenmek için sosyal medyayı etkin bir şekilde kullanması, dil engellerini aşma potansiyelini vurguladı.

Pandemi geleneksel iletişim biçimlerini bozdu ve öğrencilerin kültürlerarası etkileşimleri sürdürmek için sosyal medyaya güvenmelerine neden oldu. WhatsApp gibi platformlardaki çeviri hizmetleri, iletişimin sürdürülmesi için kritik öneme sahipti. Sosyal medya bütünleşme ve kültürlerarası uyum zorluklarını ele almada önemli bir rol oynadı. Stereotipleri ortadan kaldırmaya, öğrencilere yerel gelenekler hakkında bilgi vermeye ve özellikle öğrencilerin varışlarından önce sosyal medyayı kullanarak hazırlandıklarında uyum süreçlerini kolaylaştırmaya yardımcı oldu.

Sosyal medya platformları yalnızca iletişimi kolaylaştırmakla kalmadı, aynı zamanda sosyal bağları da geliştirmeye ve öğrencilerin KKTC'de daha fazla evlerinde gibi

hissetmelerine yardımcı oldu. Son olarak, çalışma pandemi gibi krizler sırasında iletişimin ana kaynağı olarak sosyal medyanın etkisini vurguladı. Dil engellerini aşmada, doğru bilgilerin yayılmasında ve öğrencilerin uyum ve bütünleşme süreçlerinde kritik bir rol oynadı. Özetle, bu araştırma, COVID-19 pandemisi sırasında KKTC'deki uluslararası öğrencilerin karşılaştığı iletişim, bütünleşme ve kültürlerarası uyum zorluklarını ele almada sosyal medyanın sağladığı değeri vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Medya, Kriz Iletişimi, Bütünleşme, Kültürel Uyum, Kullanımlar ve Doyumlar Teorisi.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to God, my beloved parents - Mr. Gabriel and Mrs. Victoria

Oladija and my siblings – Jeremiah Gabriel and Deborah Gabriel.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI   Artificial Intelligence

BSB   Bulletin and Board System

CDC   Centre for Disease Control and Prevention

CIU   Cyprus International University

CSU   Cyprus Science University

EMU   Eastern Mediterranean University

ER   Emergency Rooms

EUL   European University of Lefke

FOMO   Fear of Missing Out

ICT   Information and Communication Technology

IM   Instant Messaging

IoT   Internet of Things

IR4   The Fourth Industrial Revolution

MDT   Media Dependency Theory

ML   Machine Learning

MSN   Microsoft Networks

PHP   Hypertext Processor

SARS-CoV-2   Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome-related Coronavirus 2

SDGs   Sustainable Development Goals

TRNC   Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

UGC   User Generated Contents

UGT   Uses and Gratifications Theory

WHO   World Health Organization

WLAN   Wireless Local Area Network

YODAK   Higher Education Planning, Accreditation, and Coordination

                Council of TRNC.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This section presents a contextual analysis, problem Statement, research questions and scope of the use of social media in Crisis situations like the COVID-19 pandemic. It also contains the limitation of the research, the significance of the study and the function carried out by social media in the communication, integration and intercultural adaptation of international students within this period.

1.1 General Overview and Background of Study

The COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on many facets of society, including educational institutions throughout the world. The pandemic also significantly affected the educational institutions in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), which has become known for its large international student community. Due to their lack of familiarity with the culture of the region, language, and social systems, students from other nations studying in TRNC faced specific challenges. The pandemic exacerbated things by restricting physical interactions, resulting in isolation and difficulties adjusting to the new environment. During the pandemic, social media became critical instruments for communication and integration. They gave rise to a virtual environment for people to communicate, exchange knowledge, and take part in communal events, bridging physical distance.

1.2 Problem Statement

The COVID-19 brought the world to a complete standstill courtesy of the restriction in movement imposed unanimously by governing bodies all across the globe. This

sudden impediment halted the normal routines and forced everyone to compose new methods of living and connecting on a daily basis. Physical contact was reduced to the barest minimum and as such, the traditional communication methods were halted. This arupt interruption affected the communication, integration and intercultural adaptation of international students in their new environment.

1.3 Significance of this Research

Analyzing the impact of social networking platforms on communication, integration, and adaptation of international students in the TRNC during the COVID-19 pandemic is of utmost significance due to several compelling reasons.

a) **Boosting Communication**: This research can offer insight on how social media enhances interaction among students, educational organizations, and support agencies by studying how foreign students use them. Recognizing students' preferred channels and tactics for seeking information, connecting with peers, and engaging with the local community can assist institutions in developing successful communication strategies and improving the overall student experience.

b) **Fostering Integration**: When attempting to blend into an unfamiliar environment, students from other nations sometimes face extreme difficulties. Social media platforms enable students to engage with their classmates, both inside and outside of their own nation, through virtual socializing. Getting a grip on how social media platforms help in developing social relationships and promoting interactions between cultures might guide initiatives and measures targeted at improving foreign students' integration.

c) **Aiding Adaptation**: The COVID-19 pandemic has led to isolation and limited opportunities for in-person interactions. Online social networking platforms may function as peer networks, enabling students from other countries to get access to information, seek assistance, and share their experiences. Investigating how social media aids international students' adaption during the epidemic might help influence the creation of online support systems and resources targeted to their individual requirements.

d) **Policy development implications**: The results of this research can teach legislators and educational organizations in the TRNC about the necessity of integrating social media as part of their foreign student support systems. The research aims to establish guidelines and standards promoting the responsible and effective utilization of social media platforms, enhancing the overall student experience. Additionally, it strives to expand the current knowledge base, offer valuable recommendations, and foster the advancement of effective approaches to support international students facing similar situations.

1.4 Method of the Study

The primary research approach employed in this study combines quantitative methods through questionnaire-based surveys and qualitative methods involving focus group interviews. This would include a semi-structured interview involving the participants of the focus group. This study will give rise to the interviewing of international students from different cultural backgrounds other than the host community as the focus of this research is on adaptation of international students.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What adjustment challenges (i.e., cultural shock) did international students face when they came to TRNC?

2. In what ways did the COVID-19 pandemic affect communication of international students in TRNC?

3. In what ways did the COVID-19 pandemic affect integration and intercultural adaptation of international students in TRNC?

4. In what ways did the use of social media contribute in helping international students deal with communication related issues during the COVID-19 pandemic?

5. In what ways did the use of social media contribute in helping international students deal with integration and intercultural adaptation challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic?

6. Is social media an effective tool in ensuring the continuance of communication among international students during crisis situations like the COVID-19 pandemic?

7. Is social media an effective tool in facilitating integration and intercultural adaptation among international students during crisis situations like the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.6 Scope of the Study

A questionnaire based survey will be conducted on 313 international students to provide quantitative reports from the macro-group and support in-depth data that will be derived from the qualitative analysis. To gain a comprehensive understanding of international students' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and how social media facilitated communication, integration, and adaptation in their new host community, a focus group comprising approximately 10 participants will be

assembled. International students who came into TRNC during the heat of the COVID-19 pandemic will be of premium advantage to this research as social media was their only window of access to the new environment and their way of life within these periods. Interviews would be conducted and transcribed to have them frame their experiences verbally.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The primary drawback of this study is that the sample primarily consists of students from Sub-Saharan Africa, leading to potential skewness in the findings. A total of 168 students making up 53.7% of the total respondents were from that region. This bias arose because students from this region were more responsive, resulting in a larger proportion of respondents compared to other regions.

This sample bias may restrict the significance of the results when applied to international students from other regions. The same issue was recorded during the focus group interview. 9 out of the 10 participants that participated were also from Sub-Saharan Africa while only 1 student was from the MENA Region. This goes to say that the result from this exercise might be regionally biased to a considerable extent.

In the pursuit of a comprehensive and culturally diverse research cohort of participants, this study employed a combined methodology of snowball sampling and purposive sampling. Despite these meticulous efforts, the discerned bias did not manifest in a structurally significant manner. A noteworthy trend emerged as international students exhibited a proclivity towards fostering friendships with individuals hailing from disparate cultural backgrounds and geographical

regions.This inclination served as a distinctive hallmark within the context of the study.

In the endeavor to attain a representative sample, questionnaires were thoughtfully disseminated to individuals encompassing a wide spectrum of cultural backgrounds. It is pertinent to acknowledge that a portion of the intended respondents declined participation in the study.

However, those who did engage in the research process exhibited a remarkable proclivity for referring their peers, thereby fortifying the study's outreach. This cascading referral mechanism engendered a ripple effect, further augmenting the diversity and inclusivity of the gathered data, ultimately contributing to the overall robustness of the research findings.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The protracted nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the accompanying lockdown restrictions, necessitated a deliberate shift toward new communication technologies in redesigning daily routines. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in contemporary crisis communication, thorough consideration is given to relevant literature in this field of research.

This chapter involves a comprehensive review of existing academic literature to gain insights into the rapid adoption of new communication technologies in two distinct settings: those already utilizing these tools in line with technological advancements, and those predominantly traditional, facing movement restrictions during the pandemic. Additionally, the study examines literature on intercultural communication and the impact of social media on learning, communication, and adaptation during the COVID-19 period. For a comprehensive list of references used in this dissertation, please refer to the dedicated pages.

2.1 Cultural Communication and Identity

In traditional terms, a culture was described as a group or population with the ability to sustain itself independently, being large enough to generate new generations without relying on external influences. This encompassed the entire collection of beliefs, experiences, and behavioural patterns of the group, along with the concepts, values, and assumptions about life that formed the basis of those beliefs.

Furthermore, it also considered how these cultural elements transformed due to interactions with other cultures. These cultural components were grouped by Hofstede (1994) into four categories: symbols, traditions, beliefs, and legends. Both verbal and non-verbal communication use symbols. Within a society, rituals are the key communal actions from a social perspective.

Values are the beliefs about what is right or wrong, attractive or unattractive, normal or unusual, many of which are shared by the majority of a culture's members, or at the very least by those who hold influential positions. Heroes are either genuine or made-up individuals who serve as role models for good behaviour within a society. The myths of a society, which can be the topic of books and other types of writing, express the heroes of that civilization (Rushing & Frentz, 1978). For instance, Rushing (1983) suggested that the rugged, individualist cowboy of the American West is a persistent myth in American society.

These ideas and behaviours are passed down through generations, starting from birth in the home and at school, and are embraced voluntarily by those who identify themselves as part of a specific group. This is what Collier (1988) define as "cultural identity," which involves a sense of connection with others and a perception of acceptance into a group that shares a common set of symbols, meanings, and behavioural norms.

Understanding someone's cultural identification provides insight into their affiliations and the shared experiences they have with their cultural group. However, assuming that a person belongs to their culture in the same way as everyone else leads to generalizations and stereotypes about diverse members within that culture.

Recognizing cultural identification entails being aware of the differences between individuals and the diversity that exists among various cultures. The diversity among cultures is often more significant than their distinctiveness, which means that knowing someone's cultural identification alone may not offer sufficient or accurate insights into who they are. However, gaining an understanding of another person's culture can assist in comprehending the unique opportunities and challenges faced by each member of that cultural group. It is essential to recognize that our knowledge of other cultures, apart from our own, is limited and can only be acquired indirectly.

The subjective prejudice of our personal culture limits our exposure and understanding of other cultures. A Canadian adult will never truly comprehend what it was like to grow up in Australia. You must comprehend every experience that each of a culture's members has in order to begin to comprehend it. This includes verbal and nonverbal communication, body language, social interactions, religious practice, philosophical epistemology, and value systems, as well as relationships, weddings, marital rites, and household traditions, as well as meals, entertainment, jobs, governmental structures, educational systems, and communication, as well as general wellbeing, transportation systems, and economic institutions.

Culture is a sum-total of the social patterns, ideologies and customary practices that an individual would have to learn and perform in order to blend in and not be noticed as an "alien" in a foreign country. There is no genetic component to culture. Interaction with other members of the culture is how all these cultural tenets are taught. Numerous cultural customs are often perceived as superstitious, and the concept of superstition holds a strong psychological and cognitive element.

As defined by Huque et al. (2007), superstition refers to beliefs regarding specific events that cannot be explained through scientific reasoning. Modern science opposes superstition due to its association with behaviors and opinions based on unscientific characteristics. Despite the extensive scientific and technological progress and the abundance of information in the contemporary era, superstitious inclinations continue to persist in human existence. These ideas are deeply ingrained in people's minds, defying any boundaries, as noted by Gammeltoft (2002). Superstition connects events without providing a logical or scientific explanation; occasionally, superstition also incorporates chance (Hirshleifer, 2018).

These practices are tailor-made for the cultural contexts they feature in are thought to have an impact on how things turn out. These customs are an integral part of one's culture and identity. People might not even observe these traditions, but they can definitely identify what they are. In the Turkish culture, it is believed that blue eye beads fight against the "evil eye". These beads are frequently used as ornaments or strung from trees, automobiles, and even homes (Bozkurt & Temür, 2014).

In popular literature and the media, the idea of culture is frequently understood in terms of regional identification sources. People frequently equate national citizenship with culture. It is evident that within nations, there exist small groups exhibiting a consistent set of qualities that function as cultures, influencing human behaviour and providing essential elements of identity. These groupings have been referred to as *subcultures, co-cultures, subgroups,* and *microcultures*.

A group of individuals with the same ancestry and background who have a unique and similar culture that has been passed down through the centuries are referred to as

an ethnicity (Zenner, 1996). Tribes could be a phrase that is better in driving this understanding, for example, some people in Afghanistan, for instance, identify as Tajiks or Pashtuns.

Some estimates place the number of ethnicities in the globe at 5,000. (Stavenhagen, 1986). Language and dialect, intonations, individual characteristics, household nomenclatures, rites, and faith are just a few examples of the characteristics that ethnic groups may have in common. Involvement with and perception of inclusion into a group that shares a background and culture are referred to as having an ethnic identity (Collier, 1988). The term "minority" is occasionally used. Technically speaking, numerical designations are referred to as minorities. Therefore, if a group has fewer members than a group that has a bigger number of members, it may be considered a minority. The term majority carries political connotations and the phrase "majority rules" is used so frequently in the U.S that the terms nearly sounds the same. The Oxford English Dictionary claims that ethnic groupings were first described as minorities in 1921.

Since then, the majority has been linked with advantage, while the minority has been connected with disadvantaged groups. The manner in which words are scripted has evolved, much as the meanings of words like "culture" also have. Ethnic identification can form the basis of a cultural identity and impact interactions with individuals outside of that particular group (Dubé & Bellerose, 1986). A study conducted on English and French speakers in Quebec revealed that while interactions between individuals from different ethnic backgrounds were perceived to be as friendly as those between people from similar backgrounds, they were also perceived to be less profound and intimate.

The researchers came to the conclusion that those who practiced the art of communication in their study restricted the conversations to relatively brief sessions in order to guarantee that interethnic relations were harmonious.

2.1.1 Culture and Communication

When it comes to the examination of cultural identities, communication serves two crucial purposes: (i) Individuals learn proper actions through communication, and those behaviours are governed through communication. (ii) Communication is the method through which members of one group communicate with members of another group, and, on a more basic level, the method by which formal groupings interact with one another.

While culture might seem neutral at first glance, its profound influence on shaping individual identities and the entire community is rooted in values expressed through institutions such as families, schools, and healthcare systems. Language, being influenced by culture, plays a significant role in how messages are conveyed and interpreted (Airhihenbuwa, 2007).

Without studying communication, culture cannot be known, and communication can only be understood through the lens of the culture it gives credence to.There have been tragedies and deaths as a result of hiccups in the art of interpersonal contact across communities throughout history. In order to promote empathy, compassion, and peaceful cohabitation among varied populations, cross-cultural communication is essential. Miscommunications and disagreements across ethnicities have resulted in terrible occurrences and fatalities throughout history, underlining the urgent need for thorough research in this field.

To avoid such catastrophes in the future, it is even more important to research and advocate for good cross-cultural interaction in light of current events. Throughout history, incidents of disasters and fatalities brought on by cultural miscommunication have been recorded severally. One instance is the 1967 Detroit riots, which resulted in 43 fatalities and significant damage to property over the course of five days due to a lack of understanding and distrust involving the Afro-American population and the primarily white police force (Sugrue, 2014). The tragic outcomes that can result from a failure in communicating properly across cultures are brought to light by this incident. The pressing necessity for a thorough investigation on cross-cultural communication has been underscored by recent occurrences even more. For instance, the spike in hate crimes directed at Asian populations during the COVID-19 epidemic is a stark illustration of how misunderstandings and the dissemination of false information may encourage prejudice and aggression (Hsin & Xie, 2020). Such occurrences highlight the need of efficient cross-cultural communication in preventing tensions from rising and fostering societal cohesion.

Additionally, the international demonstrations prompted by George Floyd's passing in 2020 brought attention to the systematic racism and inequities that continue to exist in communities all over the world (Gupta, 2020). The demonstrations served as a reminder of how important it is to recognize and address cultural differences as well as the necessity of open communication and respectful involvement in order to overcome barriers and advance social justice.

2.1.2 Intercultural Communication

Every culture has standards defining acceptable and unacceptable behaviour for its members. It would undoubtedly be difficult to learn the conventions of all cultures if you were to address intercultural relations from that standpoint. You could never

become familiar with all the guidelines for acceptable and unacceptable conduct in any culture you encountered. One would constantly be transgressing the law and insulting others. In actuality, you wouldn't even be aware of whether you were required to adhere to the standards of the other culture or to act in accordance with your own standards while honouring that of the other culture.

Examining the broad obstacles to cross-cultural communication is a better strategy. Six such impediments have been identified by Barna (1997): language, preconceptions and bias, nonverbal misreading, ethnocentrism, anxiety, and presuming similarity rather than difference. Here, we address issues that may occur in cross-cultural interactions using her categories of obstacles. This chapter discusses the first four types of obstacles. Language and nonverbal misinterpretations are covered separately in the following chapters. Your ability to communicate across cultures can be strengthened by taking into consideration these typical errors.

2.1.2.1 Anxiety

A great deal of anxiety is the first difficulty in inter-cultural communication. It seems reasonable to focus on that sensation instead of being completely involved in the given interaction when one is concerned due to uncertainties as regards what to do. For instance, you could have been anxious on your first day at a new work or college campus. It's possible that you made simple errors and came off as uncomfortable to others because you were so aware of how unfamiliar and displaced you felt. Sugawara (1993) conducted a survey of 135 American co-workers and 168 Japanese co-workers in Japanese enterprises who were based in the country. Only 8% of their American counterparts expressed impatience with the Japanese employees' English.

The study by Sugawara looked at how enhanced awareness of oneself may make people uncomfortable in social situations. The research revealed that those who were acutely aware of their strangeness and feeling of being displaced felt more discomfort, which may result in misunderstandings and be viewed as uneasy by others. The increased self-awareness made it harder to feel at ease in social situations.

Recent research has confirmed the idea that social fulfilment greatly depends on awareness of oneself. For example, extremely self-conscious people frequently experience social anxiety and have trouble forging genuine connections with others, as indicated by Smith & Wilson (2020). Similar findings were made by Brown & Jones (2019), who discovered that increased self-awareness might result in self-focused attention that causes people to overanalyse their actions, which causes discomfort and decreased social comfort.

In addition, Johnson et al. (2021) demonstrates that self-awareness therapies, such mindfulness exercises, can be successful in lowering social discomfort. People can reduce self-consciousness and enhance their general social comfort by practicing present-moment mindfulness and acceptance.

2.1.2.2 Assuming Similarity Instead of Difference

It may make sense to act just like you would in your domestic culture when you are unfamiliar with a new one and presume there are no differences. But assuming such might lead to misunderstandings. In 1997, an incident occurred where a Danish mother entered a Manhattan restaurant and chose to leave her 14-month-old infant girl unattended in a pram outside.

This action raised concerns among other patrons, prompting them to immediately contact the police. As a result, the mother was accused of endangering her child and subsequently detained for two nights. Meanwhile, authorities placed the child in foster care, leading to the mother's resistance, as she argued, with the support of the Danish consulate, that leaving children unsupervised outside of coffee shops is a common cultural practice in Denmark. Pictures that were sent to the police showed a lot of strollers parked outside of restaurants where parents were seated and eating. The Danish woman presumed that New York and Copenhagen were comparable, and that New Yorkers did the same things that Danes did in Copenhagen. Although this incident occurred more than 20 years ago, it is still studied and examined in light of shifting society values.

The incident's effects and the larger concerns it embodies are clarified by recent references. Recent researches have emphasized how parental customs and methods vary among cultures. As a result, the occurrence may be seen in the context of divergent parenting styles found in many cultures and communities (Smith, 2022). Every culture is distinctive and unique in some way. For instance, Boucher (1974) has demonstrated how cultural norms on who is suitable for emotional expression vary. If you think that how individuals express their emotions is identical to how it is in your culture, you could see people from other cultures as lacking feeling in certain situations and improper emotion display in others.

The opposite might also be a hindrance. If one assumes difference rather than similarity, they may miss out on crucial cultural similarities. Avoid making any assumptions. Instead of presuming that customs are the same or different

everywhere, it is preferable to inquire what the custom of a place is and adhere to them to ensure compliance and easy adaptation.

2.1.2.3 Ethnocentrism

The third barrier to effective cross-cultural communication is ethnocentrism, a tendency to unfavourably compare aspects of one's own culture to those of others. It involves the belief in the superiority of one's own culture. When individuals are ethnocentric, they perceive their own culture as superior and find everything within it to be coherent and sensible. *Cultural relativism*, as opposed to ethnocentrism, is the idea that a person's ideas and actions should only be interpreted in terms of their own culture. It does not imply that all things are equivalent. It does imply that we need to make an effort to comprehend how others behave in light of their culture. Additionally, it implies that we are open to review our own cultural practices in light of knowledge about those from other cultural affiliations (Cohen, 1998).

Cultural near-sightedness or holding one's culture in contempt or with extreme triviality is a less severe version of ethnocentrism. In the United States, for instance, the term "Americans" is frequently used to refer to inhabitants of the United States alone, even though in its original context, it encompasses all residents of North and South America. Its sloppy use is an example of ethnocentrism. Cultural blindness frequently leads to the misconception that straightforward issues are similar everywhere.

2.1.2.4 Prejudice and Stereotypes

Prejudice and stereotypes provide a serious barrier to intercultural dialogue. The larger word, stereotype, is frequently utilized in the assessments of people that are formed based on their perceived or actual membership in a certain group. The term "prejudice" describes an unfounded fear or hate of a certain group, ethnicity, religion,

or sexual identity. The phrases are similar in that both of them discuss reaching conclusions about someone based on their affiliation with a certain organization.

Most people believe that racism is prejudice that involves the use of institutional, historical, or structural methods to exert power over or against a group (Hoyt, 2012). Prejudice is the unjustified dislike, distrust, or hate of a particular demography, ethnicity, faith, or sexual identity unlike the concepts of stereotyping that can either be positive or negative (Rothenberg, 1992). Individuals who are a part of the group are judged not on the basis of their individual merits but rather on the outward qualities that define them as such.

Adorno et al. (1950) classified the extremely biased individual as possessing an autocratic personality. These people have a propensity for making broad generalizations and thinking within the framework of cyclical concepts; they are also quite traditional, within the framework of morality, and not critical of the bourgeoisies and governmental institutions. Even when confronted with fresh and contradictory evidence, highly biased persons are unlikely to modify their opinions (Meloen et al., 1996).

2.2 The Information Age

In order to preserve stability in the social system, communication must exist between individuals. With the use of communication, a community may pass on its customs from one generation onto the next. Novelties and advancements in the international scene are constantly brought up by people's media needs. Through the mass media and international communication networks, new concepts and ideals are spread throughout the whole world. One might say that the world is shaped and guided by

advancements in the communication industry. Through communication networks, a global event that starts in any location quickly spreads to every single location on the planet.

Mass media provide a new dimension to the communication process since they may concurrently reach large numbers of people. Using the mainstream media, which has become an important part of our everyday lives, we learn about and analyze events that take place all over the world. (Büyükbaykal, 2014). Communication has transformed into a vast marketplace, playing a significant role in driving consumption, increasing productivity levels, and shaping the global economy.

Over time, cross-cultural communication has become a subject of interest across diverse disciplines, including socioeconomic, cultural, regional, psychological, anthropological, historical, and philosophical research. This research has explored a wide range of aspects, such as advertising, television programs, documentary films, motion pictures, interpersonal communication, persuasion, propaganda, and the influence of attitudes and behavior changes. Sociological research has been increasingly drawn to this field, incorporating diverse attitudes and paradigms (Tekinalp & Ruhdan, 2009).

In 1968, the idea of waking up one day and connecting to the "World Wide Web" on a "personal computer" before breakfast would have been beyond imagination. Similarly, foreseeing the disintegration of the Soviet Union, once a powerful communist nation, happening quietly instead of dramatically, would have seemed unlikely. Moreover, it would have been surprising to envision an extremist assistant

professor at the Nanterre institution perceiving businesses with a "creative" and "flexible" approach to productivity (Stern, 2000).

According to Manuel Castell's projections, what we are experiencing is merely the beginning. As we move into the realms of "placeless space" and approach the dawn or dusk of "timeless time," we enter the world of "actual virtuality," where things are likely to get even more chaotic. If we make the wrong choices, we may encounter the "perverse" elements of this new world, including fundamentalists, international criminal organizations, and perpetrators of violence against children. On the other hand, we may also discover a sphere of astonishing abundance, where the old boundaries of our species and the material world as we know it have been eliminated (Stern, 2000).

The "information age" has progressively drifted to centre stage over the last two or three decades. The concept of the information age is built upon the emergence of new communication technologies. This term, "information age," has been frequently mentioned in various pieces of literature that focus on the concept of globalization and how this technological advancement is gradually reshaping our daily lives (Albrow, 1996; Fuller, 1996; Melucci, 1996; Garon, 1999; Webster, 2005; Castells, 2010, 2011; Devriendt et al., 2011).

The continuous progress of these new technologies consistently transforms the world into a global village (McLuhan, 2009). The idea of the information age was introduced in the 1990s when most of its foundational elements were still in their early stages of development. At its inception, it was filled with theories and numerous projections on the new digital age that has played out amazingly over the

years. Frank Webster declares it as one of the most illuminating, imaginative, and intellectually rigorous accounts of today's significant features and dynamics (Webster, 2002).

Networks are the skeletal framework of society in the information age, and as such, it has completely altered and adjusted experience, production, power, and culture. Although the networking form of social organization predates the information age, the new ideology gives rise to an intentional expansion as the core of the new social structure (Castells, 1996). What triggers network flows is a more important question than the flow itself. In this new regime, stamping one's presence in a network to avoid exclusion has become vital.

Castell introduced a concept to describe the supremacy of robust networks over inherently less powerful ones, defining it as the pre-eminence 'of social morphology over social action' (Castells, 1996). The network structure is constantly growing, progressively infiltrating every aspect of our economic and social domains. It gradually absorbs and overcomes the previous narrative, not in a bid to bring it to a total halt but to integrate some of its tenets in the furtherance of its cause. It takes the form of the industrial revolution, which similarly sustained many pre-existing structures for a long time after it became mainstream. These alterations exist in diverse industries, including communication, production, circulation of finance, and power, either as individual units or in a cohesive conglomeration (Stern, 2000).

2.2.1 The Network Society

A social structure that serves as the distinctive defining characteristic of the information age is referred to as a "network society". The information age, as defined earlier, is the point in history where human activities shifted from the industrial

paradigm to the utilization of microelectronic-based information/communication technologies and genetic transmutation. Unlike the industrial age, which was built around the technological paradigm centred on the production and distribution of energy, the information age is built around Networks (Castells, 2000). The transformational advancement of the network era is enormous, and it has both absorbed and progressively replaced the preceding paradigm of the industrial age. There are a series of transformations that have and still are taking place around the world that was presented as theories or projections by Castells due to the series of observations stated in the first volume of 'The Network Society' and subsequent volumes.

Over the years and as the information age progressed, these concepts have played out immensely. Castells defined his work as a theoretical archetype of the ideal network society. The theoretical representation in these works can form a basis for a concise interpretation of the current trends in the network society. He expressly states that he intends for each reader to filter out the impractical bits while making do with the parts of this work that they find helpful, thus projecting the adoption of the disposable theory. The disposable theory encourages readers/researchers to take advantage of the valuable bit of information they gather while discarding the rest.

Castells defined *human societies* as systems that 'are constituted by the conflictive interaction among individuals organized within and around a specific social structure (Castells, 2000). Three major vital players, production/consumption, experience, and power, are highlighted, and the interplay between them gives rise to social structures. There is no fixed definition of meaning in this context as it goes through a continuous redefinition process by symbolic interaction engaged in by actors defined

by the social structure, whose actions also progressively lead to the redefinition of meaning.

Symbolic interaction is founded on the view that use is vital in defining objects. In other words, the definition of meaning in this context is entirely based on what these objects are used for, as within this scope, meaning is derived from use (James, 1907). The definition of 'self' by Mead (1934) is similar to this. He defined the concept of self as a product of active interactions between individuals and the social context within which their interactions are defined.

From these two definitions, one can infer that Castells was putting forth the idea that our new social context – the network society has become the lens through which we perceive meaning. Our perception of self largely depends on symbolic interaction within our social context.

Castells' argument revolves around three key forces that have reshaped our world: two forces that complement each other and one that contradicts them. The interplay of the technological revolution and the globalization of capitalism has profoundly transformed society. Worldwide manufacturing organization has effects on our professional and personal life as well as how we interpret space and time.

The conflicting power of identity-seeking has moved from civil society, which is secure and generally polite, to the perilous slopes of community experience, including nationality, ethnicity, religion, and territory. Our greatest dreams and darkest fears are inspired by the phrase "exclusion of the excluder by the excluded" in that context.

2.2.2 The Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Future of Higher Education

The progress of technology and the increasing digitalization of the world has given rise to a new industrial revolution known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR4). This new revolution is entirely different from the preceding ones regarding how intense, broad, complex, and reliant it is on digital transformation. The advancement in technologies has progressively gained roots in several institutional structures, not excluding the educational sector (Al-Maktoum, 2019)

As the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR4) advance, a series of improvements considered to be intelligent, open, and inclusive structures have been progressively introduced to the educational system in the wake of this new revolution.

These improvements relate in no small way to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 that projects that education will be quality, inclusive and fair for all. Artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality, cloud-based computing technology, the Internet of Things, robotics, freely accessible educational materials, social media platforms, big data, education analytics, coding, ethics, and privacy protection are some of the technological advancements that are relevant to the educational sector and make up this new revolution (Rojko, 2017).

Seeing that the mainstream educational sector was founded during the periods of the preceding industrial revolution, some instructors who have a sentimental attachment to the old methods are averse to these new structures. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR4) introduces a fresh perspective to teaching and the research process.

As a result, numerous new universities embracing this characteristic are emerging and being referred to as the fourth generation of education or Education 4.0.

These institutions are adopting concepts like Machine Learning (ML), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Learning Analytics (LA) to align with the needs and interests of students, thereby enhancing the effectiveness, motivation, and enjoyment of learning (Sharabi et al., 2021). The future of the university education system is firmly grounded in creativity and innovation. Many educational institutions switched to online instructional methods during the Covid-19 pandemic. Learning via the internet may occur in a learning environment with both instructors and learners present, working on their assignments digitally while conversing in person at the same time (Kraľovičová, 2020).

Both distance learning and online learning rely on the internet environment for teaching and learning, however unlike online learning, there is no face-to-face interaction between teachers and students or it is done via other communication means (Hurajova et al., 2022).

The instructors were ill-equipped for this emergency circumstance. The shift to the virtual classroom was abrupt and unplanned and they lacked the time and resources to regularly organize distant learning.

According to Durak & Çankaya (2020), the remote learning methods used during this time were characterized as "emergency distance learning." Since the start of the epidemic, e-learning platforms have been essential to online learning, allowing simple access to the curriculum and instructional resources on the one hand and

lower costs on the other. According to Maatuk et al. (2021), e-learning is often a web-based educational system that uses technology for instructional objectives.

The use of synchronous and asynchronous remote learning alternatives replaced in-person instruction and learning within these periods. An instructor lectures several students at once via synchronous online learning, regardless of the students' geographic location (Brady & Pradhan, 2020). communicating at a certain time and place in a specific virtual environment (Rigo & Mikuš, 2021) Live chat, streaming classes, and other synchronous delivery methods for educational information include videoconferencing and teleconferencing systems like Zoom, Webex, Teams and others.

On the other hand, asynchronous learning doesn't take place in real time; instead, communication between the instructor and students is done through emails that contain tasks to do, recordings to watch, and visual or textual materials to go through. Students work independently, are adaptable, and email, as well as social media are used occasionally to contact teachers (Hurajova et al., 2022). Numerous studies have been conducted on university students as well as educators about online delivery competence and distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, including (Durak, & Çankaya, 2020b), (Bakhov et al., 2021), (Abou-Khalil et al., 2021), (Shih et al., 2021), (Bond, 2020), and (Poláková, & Klmová, 2021).

According to several studies on both asynchronous and synchronous learning that have been published during the pandemic, both online methods have a positive impact on university educational experiences for students. (Lin & Gao, 2020; Basri et al., 2021; Amelia et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2021).

2.2.3 New Communication Technologies

Mobile and digital technologies, such as smart technologies, worldwide Internet connectivity, integrated computers, and smart gadgets, are evolving quickly and changing how people socialize, communicate, work, and learn while shattering many taboos in society and politics. On the other hand, ICT are creating new possibilities, and the controlled open spaces in communities might be useful. The latter is intriguing for both initiatives since the hyper connected world made possible by technology breakthroughs provides amazing justifications for change. There is no denying that we are addicted to technology and a wired life style (Thomas, 2013).

Undoubtedly, the pervasiveness of technology also carries disadvantages, including those associated with physical idleness, feelings of loneliness, and challenges to the rights and privacy of individuals; data breaches as well as the flow of private information are only two instances of these problems. The latter poses the difficulty of successfully protecting both individuals and the data they create. On the other hand, cities are also constituted of data, as Grey et al. (2017) pointed out. Urban data may aid in bridging the gap between top-down and bottom-up processes. The Project Cyber Parks saw the establishment of a new layer to the environment in public areas, one that is virtual. This layer reinforces the hybrid nature of the area. It is expected that society will grow progressively more interconnected due to the advancement of the Internet of Things (IoT) that connects previously disconnected things.

Both initiatives view this occurrence as an opportunity, particularly in light of the fact that wireless local area networks (WLAN) and hybrid-spaces provide new modes of place allotment, peer connections, and methods for engaging people in the creation and preservation of their environment. (Costa *et al*., 2020).

2.2.3.1 Adoption of the New Communication Technologies in Tertiary Institutions

UNICEF developed a campaign in collaboration with the Croatian Ministry of Education to encourage online learning, expose false information, and promote Internet safety (UNICEF, 2020). Additionally, in collaboration with South Korean's Ministry of Education, UNESCO created a manual for students to use at home during the lockdown to engage in media education (UNESCO, 2020). The Centre for Media Literacy in California also conducted a representative poll of parents in California to learn more about their perceptions of COVID-19 and media literacy (2020). According to Medialit (2020), "little attempts have been made in educating youngsters to think analytically about media messages concerning the COVID epidemic," as indicated by the majority of parents (p.4). They stressed how much their kids needed media literacy training! Additionally, these parents expressed their conviction that, given the situation, developing critical thinking skills as well as the capacity to access, examine, assess, produce, and engage with messages through the media platforms was crucial.

2.2.3.2 Social interaction via the New Communication Technologies

Social interaction is the native milieu of human cordiality, its source, and its core (Levinson, 2006). It is 'the framework for social institutions, the ecological niche that language occupies naturally, and the setting where culture is practiced' (Schegloff, 2006, p. 70). It can be argued that the most basic form of interaction is "sheer presence," but we cannot honestly say that interaction has occurred until there is an engagement that converts 'unfocused' to 'focused interaction' (Goffman, 1963).

As the Covid-19 pandemic progressed, everyone became confined to their houses in compliance with the lockdown protocol. The sharp readjustment of regular routines

led to severe loopholes in the traditional methods of engagement and interaction. Research shows that 'Connecting with supportive social ties, including family members, friends, or healthcare providers is protective against depression via buffering the effects of stress and enhancing coping abilities' (Razai et al., 2020; McInnis et al., 2015).

In the same vein, a decline in social interactions can yield various outcomes, including; 'maladaptation to stress (e.g., avoidance, withdrawal), depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, slower recovery from illnesses, cognitive decline, dementia, and early death' (Kotwal et al., 2021; Robb et al., 2020; Santini et al., 2020; Wand et al., 2020; Shaw et al., 2020; Livingston et al., 2020; Evans et al., 2020; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015).

Being several miles away from family and friends guarantees for sure that International students may stand the risk of being isolated. During the pandemic period, volumes of evidence projected an intense degree of loneliness and physical health decline due to confinement and isolation (Lippi et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). Referring back to the topic of digital media and the new communication technologies, computers, the web, and mobile gadgets are now commonplace in our everyday lives, with teen usage being even more prevalent.

They utilize ICT for communication, education, socialization, and recreation more and more. 91% of teens use the internet for social media, according to Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH, 2017). Although it is well acknowledged that teens are comfortable using ICT and have a basic understanding of digital media, very little is known and understood about their demands and behaviors in public spaces or the

role that technology can play in this regime of connectivity. Teenagers are increasingly spending their spare time indoors, either at home or at malls, according to Kelly et al. (2015).

Additionally, Louv (2005) emphasized the detachment from the natural world, while Mäkinen & Tyrväinen (2008) drew attention to youths' utilization of green spaces. They postulate that it could differ from adults, either as a result of the valorization of various contexts or owing to more varied usage. Keep in mind that parks and green spaces are sometimes the only "place" in the city where people may interact with nature and learn about its workings, and that open spaces are indeed knowledge settings for each citizen's lifelong learning (Klichowski et al., 2015).

2.3 Social Media Use in the 21st Century

Social media has historical precedents even though it is a relatively new phenomenon that only came about with the creation and widespread use of the internet. Women and men both visited salons during the French Enlightenment in the early periods of the 18th century to participate in intellectual conversation and social networking.

Similar to this, pubs in major cities and docks across the world functioned as a meeting place for individuals from various vocations and social strata, enabling information sharing and debate of current events. Back then, these organizations carried out the duties of social media. The potential of social media to transcend geographical boundaries was made possible by the internet, which makes it special.

Live chat rooms and groups on various social media platforms, which may be thought of as a modern-day equivalent of those salons in Paris, can instantaneously connect people from Europe, North America, and Africa without the need for a plane

ticket. With the exception of those observed exclusively through mythical narratives, such as the celestial attendants *Shunfenger and Qianliyan* in *Chinese folklore*. There is no historical analogue to the aspect of rapid, on-demand communication across great distances.

The globe is becoming more technologically sophisticated as we move forward in the twenty-first century, significantly advancing both the highly desired elements of quick and high-speed communication. This may be observed in the widening assortment of social media channels that offer a variety of in-demand services while concentrating on giving their consumers real-time information in the fraction of a second from their servers. The social media sector in the twenty-first century offers a wide range of services, from the profile-based Facebook to an image-and video based Instagram.

Nevertheless, they fall within the same general category. Internet-based social media, as outlined by *Jonathan A. Obar et al.*, incorporate the following features: *interaction, absolute reliance on user generated contents, profiles and pages for posts and reception of feedbacks,* as well as *interaction with other users*. (Obar et al., 2015).

The term "Social media" has received multiple definitions from other fields like public relations and mass media. The common denominator in these definitions is that they emphasize user-generated content on technology-based digital platforms (Carr, & Hayes, 2014). Social media is an area that is always changing; therefore, defining it is a difficult undertaking. According to Joosten (2012), it is typically used to denote a wide range of technical systems linked to collaboration and community.

More specifically, social media "employs mobile and web-based technologies to develop highly participatory platforms through which people and communities exchange, co-create, discuss, and alter user-generated material according to Kietzmann et al., (2011).

According to big data applications, Dulek & Saydan defined *social media* as social networks where users share information, actions, and passions on the web or handheld devices (Dulek, 2019; Souravlas & Anastasiadou, 2020; Souravlas, et al., 2020; Souravlas et al., 2021). Jiao et. al., (2015) claims that social media is used to build social connections and for educational objectives. Social media has caught the attention of academics in a variety of circumstances. In the same vein, Luttrell (2015) defined *social media* as the culmination of the actions, habits, and behaviors of groups of people who congregate online to exchange information, expertise, and ideas using the tool of conversational media. Conversational media are web-based apps that enable the creation and easy transmission of materials through words, images, video, and audio (Luttrell, 2015, p. 22).

The activities, practices and behaviours of online communities of people that converse with one another using conversational media to exchange information and viewpoints are referred to as "social media". "Conversational media are internet-based apps that allow for the easy generation and transmission of e-materials such as words, photos, videos, and audio". (Luttrell,2015.p.22).

2.3.1 History of Social Media

The web - based Bulletin Board System (BBS) prototype served as the forerunner to contemporary social media as we know it today. One of the earliest systems to allow for online interactions was Berkeley, California's Community Memories, which was

introduced in 1973. Community Memories was indeed a significant advance in the emergence of social media and information technology, even if it is out-dated by today's standards.

Since then, social media has seen several incarnations and expanded to include a variety of services. Online forums like PHP-based BBSs and other community websites such as Yahoo! Geocities and MSN Communities dominated the time before the year 2000. The web was not as widely used before the beginning of the century, and many online services were only starting to gain popularity. The usage of instant messaging (IM) seems to have been a common trend among Internet users at this time.

As Internet platform based digital networks was still in its infancy, MSN Messenger (later bought by Microsoft and rebranded as Windows Live Messenger), AIM, and QQ were seeing tremendous user growth. Online BBS was yet another well-liked social media platform. Small thematic communities may be found in these online forums, which also operated as incognito social media before the advent of the mainstream social media platforms. Myspace and Facebook rose to prominence in the middle to late 2000s. Contrary to the examples in the preceding sentence, Myspace and Facebook aggressively pushed users to create genuine profiles using their own names rather than adhering to the anonymous social networking notion.

Social media platforms for microblogging also emerged at the same time. A few of the numerous microblogging platforms that draw users who enjoy their anonymity and micro-blogging techniques include Twitter as well as its Chinese cousin Weibo.

As more users started to switch to these new services, which already had on-site IMs and some other cutting-edge features, the popularity of these platforms also contributed to the fall of instant messaging. More social media platforms have entered the market from early 2010 to the present, particularly well-known ones that emerged as a result of the widespread use of new technologies.

As an illustration, consider Snapchat, whose development was heavily dependent on the broad usage and widespread reception of phones, as well as Wi-Fi technologies. Older social media platforms persisted, but in order to keep up with newer models, they underwent significant changes to the quality and scope of their activities and services. Myspace and other outmoded platforms that couldn't keep up with the times vanished into little more than a recollection of the early 21st century.

There are, however, certain powerful ones that have persisted; in 2017, Facebook and YouTube dominated the ranks of active social media platforms with the strategic increase in their user engagement. In comparison to ten years ago, these platforms have undergone dramatic changes, which have helped in explaining why they continue to be successful. Social media use is currently expanding rapidly over the world in tandem with the spread of digital literacy.

 Global social media usage is predicted to have reached 3.02 billion people by 2021 (Statista, 2017). Due to its growing user base, social media will be able to outperform conventional media in terms of reach and influence. While this does not imply that social media will someday totally replace conventional media as a means of disseminating information, more individuals are using it to do so.

2.3.2 Characteristics of Social Media

According to common consensus, social networking and other Web 2.0 technologies have grown extraordinarily (Lenhart, 2010; Vandeyar, 2020; Siakalli *et al.,* 2015). However, the global COVID-19 pandemic increased its significance and made it mandatory (Tawafak et al., 2021). The social media landscape has changed as a result of these ties, both personal and professional. The Hybrid and Blended learning models received further adoption in higher institutions as a direct result of the impact of the pandemic period as a number of studies have demonstrated the benefits of employing a hybrid strategy for teaching (Alsalhi et al., 2019; Baragash & Al-Samarraie, 2018; Bayyat, 2020; Farahani et al., 2020; Kingpum et al., 2015; Li et al., 2019; Vernadakis et al., 2012).

Social media platforms are nearly a necessary aspect of most users' private life nowadays, during a worldwide health crisis, thanks to technology. Social media use involves various activities, including chatting with friends, sharing photos and videos, conversing about current events, viewing news, playing games, introducing real-time online chat, and utilizing tools for networking, communication, and collaboration (Zincir, 2017).

People utilize social media in a wide range of diverse industries. Social media is used for online engagement and marketing, building consumer connections, problem-solving, and grievance resolution (Eriksson et al. 2014; Cvijik. et al. 2013; Pinto et al. 2011; Ellison et al. 2019). It is also used for informal social networking or enhancing social capital.

The successful application of information and communication technology in the current digital economy is responsible for the industry's performance. Higher education institutions are not exempt from these rapidly evolving technological advances. Since these technologies have the potential to not only give the academic community vital information but also improve learning, they should not afford to lag behind. The astronomical popularity of social media has been aided by several studies that look at its place in higher education.

These include the investigation of the relationship between the utilization of these media platforms by researchers in tertiary institutions for instruction and learning purposes, the use of technology for learning regarding students' learning styles, the impact of online social networks on academic success, learner-generated knowledge and its impacts on student accomplishment and fulfilment, the success index of interaction using social media, mature critical thinking, and business transactions (Henley, 2018; Bothwell, 2020; Kaliyar et al., 2020; ˇZiˇzek, 2020; Naeem et al., 2020; Kaya et al., 2016).

2.3.2.1 Interactivity and Media Diversity

Social media possesses some unique qualities as stated in the previous chapter. These qualities are what differentiate it from other communication methods before the global invasion of the internet. Interactivity is what makes social media unique, and how users engage with one another distinguishes social media corporations. For instance, Instagram enables users to publish both photographs and videos. In contrast, Twitter is mostly text-based and supports a wider range of media formats, including gifs and hypertext linked videos on YouTube. These characteristics and specific offerings help social media firms stand out from each other, as well as engage in creative competitions.

2.3.2.2 Absolute reliance on user generated contents

User-generated content (UGC) refers to any content that a website receives from an unpaid source. The data may be a picture, a video, a blog or forum post, a poll answer, or a comment posted on a social networking platform.

Whatever its features and characteristics, a social media network depends on user-generated content to draw and keep users. This feature is shared with others that fall within the scope of Web 2.0.

Users of social media can communicate with one another via participating on the site. The ways in which people communicate with one another may range from liking something on Twitter to commenting on a picture on Facebook. However, all interactions may be considered to be user-generated contents in essence. The information that users upload is what makes social media a special and in-demand experience.

2.3.2.3 Profiles and pages for posts and reception of feedbacks

Social media accounts serve as the foundation for connection with other people in a virtual, frequently anonymous environment and serve as the totality of a user's online persona. These profiles can represent not just persons but also businesses, governmental and non-governmental organizations, official and unofficial organizations, as well as international and governmental agencies.

The posts they make can also vary and have varying weights depending on the characteristics of these profiles. Some social media platforms would go farther to distinguish official accounts, such as in the situations of Twitter and Weibo, designating to such profiles a verified emblem. As a result, accounts online naturally interact and produce material differently.

2.3.2.4 Interaction with other users

People who use social media interact among themselves over the internet. Depending on the specific social networking site in question, the forms of engagement might vary substantially.

Though user interactions may also be seen as contents generated by users for acquiring and keeping them, all social media platforms contain certain built-in features to enable user engagement. For instance, Snapchat relies on consumers sending photographs to their friends, which is both user engagement and content creation. The user experience of Facebook, on the other hand, is constantly being improved to support interactions through onsite private messaging and replies under contents posted.

2.3.3 Overview of Social Media Platforms

Over the past ten years, social media platforms have evolved into a key tool for gathering and disseminating information across a variety of industries, including commerce, media, scientific study, crisis management, and governance (Stieglitz et al., 2018). Social media's appeal can be attributed in part to the accessibility of public message creation and distribution at minimal cost.

A significant setting in the everyday affairs of young individuals is social media. Teens and young adults spend about 6 hours each day on social media, and they typically utilize many sites at once (Vannucci et al., 2019). Grosse emphasized that social media allows individuals in a virtual community to share information online and produce content. From our vantage point, a few crucial examples can help one understand and comprehend social media more clearly. (Grosse et al.,2016).

The most well-known social media platforms include (a) content communities like YouTube, (b) blogs like Word Press, (c) collaborative projects like Wikipedia, (d) social networking websites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, and (e) social messaging apps like Viber, Skype, and WhatsApp (Kaplan, A.M et al. 2010; Sutikno, T et al. 2016; Balakrishnan, V., 2016; Chugh et al., 2017; Bellavista, P., 2009; Rehm, M., 2019; Blackhow, C., 2020).

2.3.4 The message is shaped by the medium

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, both domestically and globally, is largely helped and facilitated by false information that travels around the world in milliseconds breeding volumes of mistrust and undue pressure. Even though its effects can be catastrophic, such false information is not always malicious. Agile, precise, globally accessible counter-information that assumes the highest moral position and communicates a habitual scientifically accurate narrative is the only line of defence against growing mass hysteria, fearful uproar in the financial sector, as well as unintended misconceptions of both the scientific facts and epidemiological studies as regards COVID-19 (Garrett, 2020).

Some people have tried to block false information regarding COVID-19 from spreading on social media by putting pressure on social media companies to ban propagators of malicious activities, but this tactic has not deterred fraudsters, scammers, and conspiracy theorists. Governments must support truth-seeking organizations, or at the very least those that make an effort to find relevant data based on scientific principles—if financial markets are uneasy about the circulation of relevant data and destabilization to supply chains and manufacturing caused by the global spread of COVID-19.

As inquiries and evaluation of information as regards the COVID-19 pandemic progresses, the "truth" might and should evolve, but its core should always represent objectivity, a healthy dose of suspicious evaluation and cross-examination, as well as an unwavering belief in the importance of promptly disseminating life-saving information and research discovery. Such bastions need to fend off attempts to influence their message in order to serve organizational or governmental agendas. (Garrett, 2020). At the WHO, the different Institutes for the Prevention and Control of Diseases in Africa, Europe, North America, and Asia, or its correspondent offices consisting of agencies in charge of the healthcare system, there is minimal to no financing for professional communications employees. If the message isn't getting through to the media, it's quite likely that the messengers lack the means to deliver it.

There was an increased pressure for the provision of adequate understanding by the press and the general public as a result of the worldwide COVID-19 epidemic's systems of scientific information distribution, which are, to put it mildly, unprecedented. Peer assessment in clinical and scientific journals sped up research and analysis, whereas preprint services posted works that were not reviewed continuously.

The calculation of important epidemic COVID-19 aspects, such as its fundamental reproduction number, mortality rates, gender and age distribution of acute and dead cases, or the veracity of incident reporting itself, is being discussed by several researchers in public online forums. Despite the fact that the proof is still ambiguous and that study is on-going, these disagreements have fuelled media coverage.

The speed at which events are occurring, the amount of COVID-19 related facts and cases that still needs to be examined and comprehended by researchers and physicians, as well as prior intentional misdirection by certain governmental administrations made it more difficult to distinguish facts from misinformation. We perhaps would not have seen such an intense degree of outbreak if China had permitted Doctor Li Wenliang and his courageous co-workers in Wuhan to warn others about a novel highly contagious pneumonia without fear of repercussion, and if local authorities had refrained from spreading false information about the outbreak for weeks.

A substantial level of vigilance might have prevented a rapid spread on the Princess Diamond ship and worries in other nations about the potential return of contagious passengers if Japanese officials had permitted complete transparency of their tests and isolation protocols on-board the stranded passenger cruise liner. South Koreans might have been exempted from the infectious virus, ailment, and death if Shincheonji Christian community as well as its followers had not resisted providing the addresses and contact information of its participants and obstructed reporters' attempts to understand how the virus was spreading inside its enclave. (Garrett, 2020)

The Arab World may not have had anything to do with the progressive outbreak of the virus, with the Arabian withholding entry visa for pilgrimage to the holy city. If Iraj Harirchi, Iran's vice minister of health, and other members of the nation's governing board did not try to persuade the country and its people that the COVID-19 incident was "almost stabilised" (Wright, 2020).

Both Saudi Arabia and Iran lack free and open media, and both countries work to suppress narratives on social media, imprison people, or even put them to death. Additionally, the United States Centre for Disease Control (CDC) might have been subjected to undue pressure in conducting a comprehensive research throughout the early periods of the month of February, 2020, identifying compartments of localized transmission before they spread their experiment far and wide. Had the American government under the leadership of trump, not brushed aside critical analysis of its tardy reaction to the pandemic as a "conspiracy theory" claiming that it was a politically motivated attack from the left (Garrett, 2020).

If global governing bodies, organizations, and medical institutions want people who are susceptible to infection to react to COVID-19 with the appropriate level of alertness, working in corporation with medical professionals, as they behave in a way that communicates empathy and understanding, they must be ready to support their representatives on a large scale, with a sense of urgency. Now is the moment for information to take charge of the domestic and global responses to epidemics. The illness was given the COVID-19 designation by the World Health Organization (WHO), which made its decision based on evidence. But the consideration of how the general public may utilize the name was also a matter of utmost importance.

For both the members of the general populace and mainstream media outlets around the globe, COVID-19 appeared to be a difficult phrase. The fact that the illness as well as the virus (SARS-CoV-2) had names that would seem unconnected to one another may be even more perplexing to the public at large.

Some media outlets even decided on referring to the microbiological menace as the coronavirus. One theory is that no communication specialist was engaged as regards the nomenclature derivation. The agency's personnel in charge of communication and public relation should have been given the chance to seize take a peek at digital franchises, as well as pseudonyms on social media platforms before official declaration, such as the Hastagged-COVID19 (#COVID19) or a plethora of pages and groups on Facebook using possible combinations of SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19. However, had WHO taken into account the public relation's angle, they would have been more subtle in names giving.

Throughout the pandemic period, interactive networking sites continued to include a ton of counter-scientific and conspiracy fuelled claims. Wall Street, as well as the exchange market and investing community attempted to calm the markets, but instead witnessed sustained financial strain, economic unrest and precipitous decline in the financial institutions.

In order to limit the spread of economic panic moving forward, it might be in the best interests of the richest individuals, banking institutions, and businesses around the globe to invest millions in the mass media and departments in charge of public awareness in their nations and the United Nation system, particularly at the World Health Organization.

2.4 General Overview of Crisis

The word "crisis" appears often throughout the chronology of humanity's 5000-year history that has been written down. Whatever the nature of its appearance is, crises are abrupt, significant disruption of the established order, whether they take the form

of a natural disaster that renders countless number of victims homeless or a military coup that alters the whole geopolitical landscape of an area.

For many organizations to operate effectively, a foundation of stability is necessary (Liu, 2018). Additionally, crises have an ambiguous nature and are frequently unanticipated when they occur. In the absence of any previous planning, it may be extremely damaging when an organization, community or nation finds itself trapped in one. These situations might result in significant damage. While some disasters may be predicted, others happen suddenly.

Human error is oftentimes the nexus point of many of the crisis situations over the years. Other factors like machines and non-human interferences can also trigger a crisis or contribute to its virility. Crisis are sometimes rumoured to be incidental and the side effect of costly mistakes, but it can sometimes be intentionally triggered. Like in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is invariably one of the deadliest crisis situations in the 21st century, there were rumours of it being an intentionally projected catastrophe or the result of a failed experiment at many points during the outbreak.

Communication was not always this quick and with a strong ability to reach everywhere in an instant prior to the development of information technology in the 1990s, namely the growth in popularity of the internet. (Liu, 2018). Before they can even spread and go viral, or even maybe reach a degree of global awareness, many disasters have been controlled regionally. The internet, however, altered everything. Anything that is posted may be seen by anybody in the globe and it remains there indefinitely.

As technology advances, instant communications has become more practical. In consequence, this enables information about crisis situations to spread at previously unseen rates. While the instantaneous nature of current information technology gives users a broader audience and reception, errors that cause panic and has the potential of multiplying people's perception of the intensity of the disaster way beyond what is actually happening, also benefit from this enhanced speed, being compounded via transmission and complicating recovery attempts. When the "Send" key in a message is hit, the material is nearly immediately made available on another platform. The initial message, which was sent at the appropriate pace, is thereafter subject to limited control by the content's provider.

2.4.1 Phases of a Crisis

According to Pearson *et al*., each crisis is distinct in terms of its cultural context, precipitating events, and characteristic features, including high significance, time constraints, strong governmental salience, unpredictability, and vagueness (Pearson & Clair, 1998; Moynihan, 2008). According to Marcus and Goodman (1991) and the process-driven approach, there are three key phases to a crisis: activating, questioning, and post-crisis (Pündrich et al., 2009).

When it comes to the initial two, crisis management entails prevention, but the final one entails a capitalization approach that reflects an organization's capacity to respond to future crises by examining previous examples (Baum & Dahlin, 2007). Therefore, a crisis is a great opportunity for learning and a catalyst for change, which makes it all the more important to comprehend the post-crisis learning features (Veil et al., 2011; Mitroff, 2005).

2.4.2 COVID-19: A Health Crisis

The coronavirus disease, mostly regarded as COVID-19, is a communicable disease brought about by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. A set of those who contracted the virus had slight or moderate respiratory sickness, and they completely recovered without any medical treatment upon isolation. The second category, about 5%, became sick with acute respiratory distress syndrome, septic shock, and multiple organ failure and had to be granted immediate medical attention. (Claudio et al., 2020).

A brand-new, extremely infectious illness called COVID-19 posed a major danger to the general public's health. Many nations developed disruptive tactics, such as lockdown measures, health awareness campaigns, and personal care efforts, to systematically lessen the effect of the disease. Numerous changes were made to people's lives to adjust to the disastrous outbreak and the solution-oriented response of the government. For instance, psychological distress was quite prevalent in the United Kingdom during the COVID-19 pandemic (Fujiwara *et al.*, 2020).

China's commercial and agricultural food systems were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 lockdown phase (Zhang *et al.*, 2020). A high-quality education was also made physically and financially difficult for young people in the 112 countries hit by the pandemic (The Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, Youth, and COVID-19, 2020)

The City of Wuhan in China is where the first report of the virus emerged in November 2019, and not too long after, it became a global catastrophe (Syed, 2020). Since November 2019, the virus has spread to all continents, including Europe, the Americas, Australia, and the rest of Asia (Global Centre for Health Security, 2020).

In order to curb the further outbreak of the virus, several measures, like the use of face masks and social distancing, were introduced by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020). The aggravation of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2, known as SARS-CoV-2, and its rapid spread was announced by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on the 11th of March 2020. At this point, it had gone beyond a manageable extent, and it was now considered a global pandemic.

Barely 2 months later, way over 3 million cases were recorded, with over 200,000 of these resulting in death. China was one of the countries affected terribly, with over 8,000 cases and 4000 deaths. The extreme damage caused was probably because the virus emerged from within its borders. As cases declined in China, the situation began to stem out of control in many other countries around the globe. On the 4th of May 2020, the Eastern Mediterranean regions were declared to have over 200,000 cases and 7000 plus deaths (WHO, 2020).

Governmental institutions around the globe initiated a lockdown almost simultaneously to halt movement and reduce the risk of contracting the virus by contact while working on the vaccines for public consumption. The imposed lockdown ultimately affected the regular progression of activities in the higher institutions of learning situated in all countries affected by the global pandemic (Waller, Hodge, Holford, Milana & Webb, 2020).

Around this time, several recommendations to completely shut down these higher institutions of learning in compliance with the lockdown protocol and to lower the risk of further spread were granted consideration (Kawano & Kakehashi, 2015; De Luca et al., 2018). As a result of this, the higher education system in many countries

decided to temporarily shut down colleges and varsities in a bid to lower the rate of the spread of Covid-19.

The higher institution of learning is a hub of interaction, and almost every activity within its borders would entail engagement and interactivity, further heightening the risk of an increased spread. It is within this context that all the educational institutions in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (T.R.N.C.) were temporarily closed on the 25th of March; barely two weeks after the Ministry of Health declared the first incidence of Covid-19 in the country (T.R.N.C. Health Ministry, 2020).

2.5 Crisis Management and Accountability

How people react to a crisis situation and how they perceive the players engaged in the situation may depend on who or what has been held responsible for it. The attribution theory, which asserts that individuals make assessments about the causes of circumstances, particularly when such situations are unexpected and have bad results, like crisis situations, provides support for this idea. People will either assign blame for an incident to a person or group engaged in it or to uncontrollable external factors. It may be determined by attributes whether someone thinks the persons or organization responsible for the issue are to blame (Coombs, 2004, 2007). People will hold an organization accountable for the problem if they think, for example, it is capable of controlling the situation (Lee, 2004).

Because they impact the feelings triggered by the incident and subsequent interactions with the individual or entity involved, causal attributions are crucial (Coombs, 2004, 2007). For instance, Lee (2004) discovered that when a company causes a crisis, individuals are more likely to have an unfavorable opinion of the

company, are less inclined to feel empathetic toward the company, and have less faith in the company.

Furthermore, crisis accountability and negative emotional states, as well as behavioral intentions are linked, according to Mcdonalds, (McDonalds et al., 2010). In light of cultural trends like citizen empowerment and focus on building community resilience, the interaction between people and professionals in crisis management is becoming increasingly crucial (Duijnhoven et al., 2016). Governmental bodies are no longer solely responsible for the safety of the people, hence, their anticipation that citizens will take responsibility for their own safety both during the periods of the crisis and after. For instance, more independent behavior both during and after a crisis ensured shorter recovery periods, improved community reactions to warnings, fewer casualties, and less damage. These and more are the advantages of empowering individuals and building community resilience (Becker et al., 2011, 2015).

Collective effectiveness is one of the most significant elements recognized as promoting resilient communities. A community's collective effectiveness is its conviction that it can successfully address a catastrophe (Norris et al., 2008; Paton, 2013). Societies with elevated amounts of team effectiveness are more capable of managing supplies, working collaboratively toward recuperation, creating strategic plans, and are far more resilient in the event of catastrophe (Benight, 2004).

Empowerment and collective effectiveness are closely connected (Perkins et al., 2002). Empowerment is a term used to convey a person's belief in their own ability and trust in their capacity to handle problems (Norris et al., 2008). By educating

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citizens on how to handle a crisis, the local government may enable citizens in the art of actively participating, instead of sitting back and casting stones. People are more inclined to heed the local government's recommendations if they are better equipped by the municipal authorities because they believe they are better equipped to prepare for and handle a catastrophe (Becker et al., 2015).

2.6 Crisis Communication

Communication is essential in the process of seeking information, interpreting it, and ultimately delivering it to the target audience due to the heightened need for valuable information throughout moments of crisis. In this case, communication represents one of the most important components of crisis management (Sturges, 1994).

Crisis accountability has an impact on people's actions and attitudes, but so does the information they are given during a crisis. The local government offers crisis information during a crisis so that people may respond to it appropriately (Stubbé et al., 2017; Lindell & Perry, 2012). An unclear and dangerous situation might seem more under control by informing individuals about the issue and the steps they can take to minimize their harm (Seeger, 2006). But more recently, researchers hypothesized that in times of crisis, people also need to talk to one another (Sutton et al., 2008; Zoonen, & Meer, 2015).

The language chosen by leaders may have a significant impact in determining how people behave, and the message's tone can inspire confidence and provide comfort to the general public (Burdett, 1999; McGuire et al., 2020). In order to enable a change in perception for followers in the context of how they view a crucial and evolving situation collectively, language and tone therefore assist in constructing a shared

reality (Whittle et al., 2015; McGuire et al., 2020). As a result, we view leadership as a social process where the values and views that the leader espouses originate from and interact with a specific social environment (Hamilton & Bean, 2005; McGuire et al., 2020). Empathy may be used to add "a human voice" to crisis communications.

Although there has been significant discussion over the concept of empathy, most academics believe that empathy involves both cognitive and emotional components (e.g., Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Davis et al., 2004; Schoofs et al., 2022). Cognitive empathy is the ability to take another person's perspective, or to think about the world from that person's point of view. Affective empathy is the capacity to comprehend and experience another person's feelings. It is also frequently described as a sign of empathy or care (Shen, 2010).

The persuasive power of information grounded in empathy has occasionally been demonstrated. The themes they considered (such as organ donation, for example) indicate that the majority of researches on this subject are concentrated on messages that promote pro-social actions that care about others' well-being (Bae, 2008). Once the information is essential to one's personal wellbeing, little is learnt as regards persuading power of empathy (Shen, 2010). But there is some proof that empathizing with other individuals through communication has a number of advantageous effects.

First, according to Shen (2010), when information fosters empathy, it increases similarity and fosters stronger relationships between the information's source and recipient. A strong association also makes information more compelling in influencing action (Silvia, 2005; Faraji-Radet al., 2015; Steelman et al., 2015).

Also, receiving empathy-expressing information may lessen adverse emotional reactions, including rage (Decety & Jackson, 2004; Shen, 2010). Thirdly, demonstrating empathy may also increase trust in the sender, and recipients may react favourably (i.e., have more confidence that the advised activities are proper and acceptable) to representatives who acknowledge their worries and express sympathy for any damage that may have happened (Seeger, 2006; Sweetser & Metzgar, 2007; De Waal, 2008).

2.7 The use of social media platforms in crisis communication

One of today's most significant communication tools in use today is social media. By January 2020, there were 3.8 billion social media users worldwide and 4.54 billion active online users combined (Kurniawan, 2020; Obermayer et al., 2022). The usage of social media is widespread; there are around four billion active users. Social media, according to Wu et al. (2018), has the ability to raise public awareness of the need to conserve wildlife.

He mentioned that governments should employ coordinated and well-planned communication to establish confidence among individuals to drive information sharing and searching via social networks. Social media may be used to raise public awareness during disasters. With the help of social media, traditional one-way interaction between people and those making decisions on their behalf has been changed into a two-way conversation amongst all parties involved.

Communication across electronic channels is useful for influencing decision-makers' behavior. According to Kaya et al., (2020) decision-makers' perspectives are largely influenced by social media, and they have recently given social media a greater

priority. Every political party uses social media for political purposes, and it gives those with fewer resources the opportunity to spread their ideas at a low cost. The decision-makers utilized social media heavily during the COVID-19 epidemic. Public communication professionals who often watched social media felt more prepared for the Zika epidemic.

When it comes to sharing knowledge online, *Kaya and Sagsan* look at how doctors utilize social media, finding that the inclination was low owing to high work stress (Kaya et al., 2015, 2020; Nulty et al., 2016; Avery, 2017). The relevance of knowledge translation is emphasized by El-Jardali et al., (2020) who contend that funding these networks will permit pre-emptive and quick action in the event of a catastrophe like pandemics.

2.7.1 Merits of the use of social media platforms for crisis communication

The use of social media platforms has the potential to speed up the spread of information during crisis by connecting users directly to vital information sources in real-time (Graham et al., 2015; Hughes & Palen, 2012). These assertions appear to be supported by research. A couple of studies have indicated that social media enables emergency personnel, health care professionals, as well as news organizations to interact directly with the general public, thereby eradicating the length of time it takes for urgent information to reach people through traditional means of communication (e.g., Hughes & Palen, 2012; Palen & Liu, 2007).

This attribute was extensively implemented in 2012 following the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. The storm left many residents in the northeast region without electricity and with broken cell-phone service, but many continued to have access to social media platforms.

This made it possible for authorized actors (like the Governors of New York and New Jersey, Con Edison, and regional disaster response organizations) to go on distributing vital updates long after the public had lost access to many conventional information sources.

These actors utilized social media platforms like Twitter to broadcast information about the storm to the general public, including updates on power outages, instructions for evacuation, and warnings about the availability of water that was safe to drink (Stewart & Wilson, 2016).

Summarily, over twenty million tweets on hurricanes were sent out in the days leading up to the storm; over fifty percent of these tweets contained news, information updates, and videos about the storm (Guskin & Hitlin, 2012). Public health institutions like the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are also increasingly using targeted social media campaigns (Yun et al., 2016). Similar to how local health departments and hospitals/emergency rooms (ERs) have started doing it, ER wait times and advice on illness prevention are now being shared via social media (Merchant et al., 2011; Thackeray et al., 2012).

Social media may be promptly used in the event of serious public health emergency to communicate vital information to the general population. A lot of research has been done on the application of social media platforms as a repository of information for the public during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa (Fung et al., 2014), for instance, the Alexandria Virginia Health Department used Twitter effectively in 2009 to guide residents to vaccination sites during the H1N1 influenza epidemic

(Merchant et al., 2011). Social media may assist in reducing the effort for emergency response groups in addition to providing direct connection to end users. This claim has been corroborated by earlier research, which indicates that the proactive broadcast of information via the internet lowers the volume of requests for information from the general public (Hughes & Palen, 2012; Latonero & Shklovski, 2011).

As a result, every day people can participate in the emergency response process by sharing information, posting incident updates, requesting information or assistance, and even producing newsworthy material (Hughes & Palen, 2009; Hughes et al., 2008; Hughes & Tapia, 2015; Palen & Liu, 2007; Yoo et al., 2016). Private users of social media made extensive use of the platform during Hurricane Sandy to share emergency information, communicate with family and friends, and deliver first-hand accounts in the form of blog posts and videos.

Many of these accounts were subsequently utilized by conventional media organizations in their coverage of the storm (Stewart & Wilson, 2016). Similar to this, throughout the consistent bombing of Boston in the year 2013, active users on social media platforms actively shared official information about the Federal Bureau of Investigation's on-going manhunt via Twitter. This increased the public's involvement and vigilance, which ultimately aided in the capture of the bombing suspects (CBS News, 2013).

2.7.2 Downside in using social media platforms for crisis communication

According to Wang et al., (2019), there has been a significant spread of false information about health on the various social media platforms because of the lack of gatekeepers like in the case of the traditional news media. In this new regime, anyone

may publish anything, therefore authenticity is an issue and news confirmation is necessary. The relevance of knowledge translation is emphasized by El-Jardali et al., (2020), who posited that funding these networks will facilitate pre-emptive and rapid action in the event of a catastrophe like pandemics.

Social media users spread false information because they don't have time to verify the source, as observed by Talwar (2019). In their study of official reactions to the COVID-19 outbreak in China, Japan, and South Korea, Shaw et al., (2020) took note of the false news disseminated via social media during the pandemic which may have incited the need to take legal actions to stop its spread. According to Shimizu (2020), false information and misleading news about COVID-19 has contributed to an increase in bigotry and xenophobia toward patients and Chinese tourists in Japan, where the hashtag *#ChineseDon'tComeToJapan* has gained popularity.

According to Huang & Carley (2020), bots were responsible for over half (45%) of the COVID-19-related tweets. Furthermore, authors claim that false news links in tweets are less likely to spread internationally since they are more prone to be reposted inside the nation in which they were originally posted.

In their analysis of COVID-19 as well as the 5G conspiracy idea on Twitter, Ahmed et al. (2020) notes that one fraudulent profile clustered with 408 other Twitter users sent 303 messages before Twitter shut them down. This ratio emphasizes the value of social media users being self-aware and checking the reliability of the source before sharing. The significance of healthcare practitioners disseminating scientific information via social media is also emphasized, which can effectively hinder erroneous information from being circulated (Connor et al. 2020; Orso et al. 2020).

Similar to this, Erku *et al*. (2020) stresses the need for pharmacists in the fight against false information about medications and therapies.

King warned that academics might contribute to the spread of false information by quickly disseminating unfinished or unreported findings about COVID-19 (King, 2020). Researchers are capable of distinguishing between published content and work-in-progress. In the same vein, there's every likelihood that the public or the media won't see the distinction and as such, use these inaccurate assumptions to spread unfounded and likely inaccurate works through headlines.

Additionally, the widespread dissemination of these false tales across social networks (Facebook messenger, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter) and media has produced turmoil and a stressful environment for the students (Gautam *et al*., 2020). Hence, the UK government cracks down on false information to reduce fear and disinformation (BBC, Coronavirus: Fake News Crackdown by UK Government, 2020).

Similarly, the Peruvian government developed a website to summarize misleading news and later said that anybody spreading false information would face a prison sentence. Official logos of governmental bodies are often utilized in false news. (Alvarez-Risco *et al*., 2020; Kadam *et al*., 2020).

Fake news censorship is a hotly contested issue that has been around for a while. If fake news is prohibited, it will stop misinformation from spreading and lessen the ensuing fear. However, it also carries the possibility of outlawing free expression since governments would decide what constitutes false news, and authoritarian regimes may use this to stifle dissent and increase their influence over the media

(Henley, 2018; Bothwell, 2020). Nevertheless, whether during catastrophic events or political campaigns, the effect of false news on society cannot be ignored.

A recent example is the US presidential election of 2016. With 98.36% accuracy, Kaliyar *et al*. (2020) developed an algorithm to improve false news identification. Since Ziˇzek (2020) warns that coronavirus hysteria would worsen if public started to distrust officials about the manipulation or distribution of information, efficient utilization of information technology may be able to stop the spread of false information without the need for government action.

According to Naeem & Bhatti (2020), infodemic poses a serious threat to public health during the COVID-19 pandemic because it is difficult for people to tell the difference between the truth and fake news, highlighting the urgency of taking action and informing people to stop the propagation of false information. Similar to this, Ahmad *et al*., (2020) claim that consumers cannot tell the difference between true and incorrect information, which heightens the anxiety.

The usage of social media led to psychological issues such as fear of missing out (FOMO), hypersensitivity to likes gained, public vulnerability owing to mood expression, and anxiety about losing social media profiles or reclining in the statistical value of their accounts. The preservation of mental health was crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Roy *et al*. (2020), Cyber psychology also has to be taken into consideration in addition to virus-related worry, as individuals utilized their technical gadgets a lot more as a result of the lockdowns. Problematic cell use may cause anxiety, according to Coyne *et al*. (2019).

They performed their research in the era before the outbreak, unlike recent times when smartphone use is significantly more pervasive. (Kaya et al., 2016; Blachnio et al., 2018; Pütten et al., 2018; Gautam et al., 2020). FOMO has been characterized as a person's intense worry over missing out on important, enjoyable, or monumental events shared by their peers. The deficits relating to the innate demands for relatedness, competence, and autonomy have been fundamentally operationalized as FOMO (Przybylski et al., 2013).

Users of social media have high levels of engagement with these platforms because they may be intrinsically motivated to do so (Hadlington, & Scase, 2018; Przybylski et al., 2013); these needs include interpersonal attachment (Bachnio and Przepiórka, 2018), belonging (Wang et al., 2018), and popularity (Beyens et al., 2016; Vernon, 2016).

There are also studies that claim social media use causes anxiety. B'erail et al., (2019), claims there is a link between using YouTube and social anxiety. Ruggieri et al. (2020), goes on to say that users' anxiety may rise as a result of unfavorable comments, feedback, and sharing. Additionally, social media use has been linked by authors to mental issues like despair and anxiety.

According to Mansouriehab (2020), who looked at current studies on COVID-19, those who follow more news had greater COVID-19-related anxiety levels. Furthermore, according to Huang & Zhao (2020), time spent contemplating the COVID-19 is detrimental to one's mental health. According to *Hawes et al*., (2020), the amount of time spent on social media may cause anxiety. He indicated a 20% rise in the amount of time spent on applications.

In reaction to COVID-19, there was a 50% increase in data traffic. These statistics show that, given all the COVID-19-related news, consumers will have greater issues when using social media and other technologies. (A. Hutchinson, 2020; M. Sweney, 2020). An opportunity for consultancy exists because prior studies have shown that people express their emotions on social media.

Additionally, Nisar & Shafiq (2019) assert that social media may be utilized to provide online medical support. Moreover, they mentioned that the social network provides users with social assistance. Rovetta & Bhagavathula (2020), urges health organizations to utilize Google Trends to forecast user behaviour and minimize panic-related searches for COVID-19-related terms because panic users are more inclined to do so (T. Kaya, 2016; Hsu *et al.,* 2020).

2.8 Country's Profile

Figure 2.8: Map of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus showing Provincial divisions.

The Cyprus War, often referred to as the Cyprus conflict, was a protracted and intricate battle that mostly took place on the Eastern Mediterranean Island of Cyprus.

With a lengthy history of many administrators, like the Ottoman Empire and the British Empire, Cyprus is a strategically important location in the Eastern Mediterranean (Hughes-Wilson, 2011).

Tensions between the Turkish Cypriot minority, who supported division and stronger connections with Turkey, and the Greek Cypriot minority, who desired enosis (union) with Greece, were the root of the war. The EOKA (National Organization of Cypriot Fighters), a nationalist organization of Greek Cypriots led by George Grivas, first appeared in the early 1950s with the goal of achieving enosis and overthrowing British colonial control. In Cyprus, the EOKA began a guerilla war against British soldiers, sparking instability and unrest (Hughes-Wilson, 2011).

Cyprus was freed from British sovereignty in 1960, but its constitution set up a convoluted system of power-sharing amongst Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Intercommunal violence occasionally broke out between the two communities as ethnic tensions between the groups continued. President Makarios was overthrown and Turkish forces entered Northern Cyprus as a result of a coup perpetrated by a Greek military junta in 1974 with the intention of annexing Cyprus (Hughes-Wilson, 2011).

The guarantor countries had a huge impact on both the internal crisis in Cyprus and the external conflict. Based on the Treaties of Guarantee and Alliance signed in 1960, when Cyprus became independent, the terms "guarantor countries" in this context usually consist of Greece, Turkey, and the United Kingdom (Hughes-Wilson, 2011).

Due to common ancestry with the Greek Cypriot population, Greece, one of the guarantor countries, took a keen interest in the outcome of Cyprus. Greece has ties to Greek Cypriot nationalist organizations and supported the EOKA movement for enosis (union with Greece). In an effort to unify the island with Greece, the Greek military junta staged a coup against President Makarios in Cyprus in 1974. This coup led to the military action by Turkey (Hughes-Wilson, 2011).

Another guarantor country, Turkey, had an especially strong stake with regards to the Turkish Cypriot minority. In 1974, Turkey began a military operation in Cyprus to safeguard Turkish Cypriots and avoid enosis with Greece. Due to this action, Cyprus was effectively divided. As the previous imperial power in Cyprus, the United Kingdom still had jurisdiction over two regions: Akrotiri and Dhekelia. Although it was a guarantor nation, the UK's involvement was less significant than both Greece and Turkey. Turkey's operations in northern region resulted in the island's de-facto split into the Republic of Cyprus (governed by Greek Cypriots) and the unilaterally declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (recognized only by Turkey). In order to keep track of the truce and encourage talks between the warring parties, the UN formed the UNFICYP peacekeeping mission. A permanent resolution has eluded several attempts at reunion and peace accords throughout the years (Hughes-Wilson, 2011).

Through its participation in the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), the UK supplied military bases on the island and contributed to international peacekeeping activities. The historical, partisan, and strategic goals of the guarantor countries were linked with their actions in the Cyprus War. The military ramifications of Greece and Turkey's participation were clear, although the

UK's engagement was more closely tied to the upkeep of military installations and diplomatic attempts to end the conflict (Hughes-Wilson, 2011).

It's crucial to remember that the Cyprus dispute continues to be sensitive and complex, with differing opinions on the objectives and functions of the three guarantor countries. International efforts to resolve the dispute completely and unite the island have been underway for decades (Hughes-Wilson, 2011). The separation from the Republic of Cyprus (ROC) in the southern part of the island resulted in the construction of physical barriers, especially what became known as the Green Line buffer zone. (Webster & Timothy, 2006)

Despite its formation, the TRNC still has a long way to go before it gains recognition as an independent nation internationally. The main barrier is the UN, which views the TRNC as an unlawful organization and acknowledges the ROC as the island's legitimate government (Yılmaz, 2019). Since most nations and international organizations hold this position, the TRNC is marginalized on the international scene. For the TRNC, not being recognized has major consequences. It limits its capacity to interact diplomatically, take part in the activities of global organizations, and take advantage of the economic and commercial possibilities open to recognized governments (Doğan, 2018).

Turkey is still the only nation that acknowledges the TRNC's independence and offers it political, financial, and military assistance (Elci, 2021). This assistance strengthens the infrastructure, economic growth, and security of the TRNC. Turkey, which offers financial support and functions as a significant commercial partner, has a significant impact on the economy of the TRNC (Ker-Lindsay, 2019).

North Cyprus has a vibrant higher learning sector that actively adheres to the principles and guidelines of the Bologna Process, securing the country's position in the European Higher Learning System. This dedication to upholding international standards guarantees that students in North Cyprus are able to obtain a high-quality higher education at a price that is both cost-effective and offers them a variety of program options (YÖDAK, 2019).

In North Cyprus, higher education institutes (HEIs) are important since they account for a sizeable amount of the economy—roughly 40%. This indicates the significance and economic strength of the higher education sector. With the founding of the first university in 1979 (EMU), the path of higher education institutions in North Cyprus began. Since then, more universities have sprung up, and as of September 2019, there were a total of 20 institutions operating. (YÖDAK, 2019).

With more than 1500 programs accessible at all three academic levels—bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees—North Cyprus provides a wide range of academic opportunities. This varied collection meets a wide range of academic goals and professional objectives. North Cyprus' higher education system is strongly focused on internationalization and has a sizable international student population (YÖDAK, 2019).

Only 10% of the 102,000 international university students in TRNC are locals. With around 50% from Turkey and the balance of 40% from 125 other nations, the learning atmosphere is extremely international. English is required as the official language for instructional purposes in North Cyprus, making it easier for foreign students to enroll there. Although the majority of programs are taught in English,

others, including law and Turkish literature, are provided in Turkish in order to meet particular needs (YÖDAK, 2019).

The certification of several programs by international accrediting organizations, such as ABET, ASIIN, FIBAA, IACBE, ECBE, AS, EQUALS, AACSB, ACPE, TEDQUAL, MIAK, MUDEK, YK, and UK NARIC, serves as further evidence of the high caliber of education in North Cyprus. Additionally, the majority of institutions are full members of well-known international organizations for higher learning, including EUA, IAU, FUIW, EURASHE, and UK NARIC. Graduates of universities from North Cyprus can easily seek additional education or work possibilities elsewhere in the globe because of their widespread acceptance and recognition (YÖDAK, 2019)

Multiple prominent institutions of higher education with a broad selection of courses in numerous fields can be found in TRNC. The nation's dedication to offering high-quality education is demonstrated by the sector's on-going expansion. The number of universities has expanded significantly, going from 1 [Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU)] in 1979 to 17 [Middle East Technical University North Cyprus Campus (METU NCC), Near East University (NEU), Girne American University (GAU), Cyprus International University (CIU), European University of Lefke (EUL), University of Kyrenia (UK), American University of Cyprus (AUC), University of Mediterranean Karpasia (UMK), City Unity College Nicosia (CUCN), Cyprus Social Sciences University (CSSU), Arkin University of Creative Arts and Design (ARUCAD), Cyprus West University (CWU), Lefke European University (LEU), Cyprus Science University (CSU), Netkent Mediterranean Research and Science University (NMRSU), and Istanbul Technical University North Cyprus Campus

(ITU NCC)] in 2022, based on the report from the Higher Education Planning, Evaluation, Accreditation, and Coordination Council of TRNC (YÖDAK, 2022).

The number of students from other nationalities enrolled in higher education institutions in TRNC has significantly increased in recent years. Students from all over the world are drawn to the school because of the varied cultural atmosphere as well as the possibility of being taught in English. The Ministry of National Education and Culture of TRNC (2022), recently released data showing that the overall number of foreign students studying in TRNC has increased significantly, hitting an aggregate of 12,500 in the academic year 2021–2022. The foreign student body in TRNC is dispersed throughout a number of geographical areas. According to a research by Özdemir & Gökmen (2021), vast majority of foreign students in TRNC are from nearby nations like Turkey, followed by Middle Eastern countries, Africa, and Europe (YÖDAK, 2022).

The greater proportion of students from these regions is due in part to TRNC's geographic closeness to them as well as its cultural and historical links. Since 1982, Northern Cyprus has welcomed international students for higher education. Since that time, there's been a continuous increase in the amount of international students, who today represent over 68 different nations. The fact that Northern Cyprus has globally renowned and accredited universities helps to improve the country's reputation abroad. The structures and amenities at Northern Cyprus' universities are also continuing to expand at an unparalleled rate, and they can currently be favorably contrasted with those of other countries (Katırcıoğlu, 2010).

2.9 Theoretical Framework

2.9.1 Media Dependency Theory

In 1976, *Melvin DeFleur* and *Sandra Ball-Rokeach* devised the Media Dependency Theory (MDT). It is a methodical approach to investigate how audiences are affected by mass media. The theory also looks into how audiences, media, and social systems interact (Carillo et al., 2017). Additionally, according to MDT, dependence is a connection in which a need must be met repeatedly through interaction on social media platforms (Lin, 2008). The link between media, as well as the consumer, such as students, is the theory's core area of attention. People in information-based cultures frequently become reliant on the media to meet a range of requirements (Lee & Choi, 2018).

According to *Ball-Rokeach* and *DeFleur*, an audience will become more dependent on a medium if the acts it does on their behalf are successful. Additionally, a society's degree of instability affects how dependent its citizens are on the media to provide information, which increases the likelihood that the media would try to sway the public (Lin, 2008). The media becomes more significant to a person as they become more reliant on it to fulfil their desires. Because of the restrictions in movement, social media played a very crucial role during the lockdown; hence this theory is extremely applicable in the study of these periods.

The dependence of an audience on the media may have three different kinds of effects: cognitive, emotional, and behavioural. The media's involvement in causing changes to an audience's attitudes, beliefs, and values is known as having cognitive impacts. Deactivation is an example of a behavioural impact that happens when

particular audience members stop from performing certain behaviours that they would have performed, if they had not been introduced to specific messages from the media. Affective consequences include the creation of feelings of dread and worry (Li 2014; Lee & Choi 2018).

The MDT also argued that when people's environments and aspirations changes, their reliance on social media also change, indicating that people's reliance on media increases, as well as the media's effect on their thought processes and behaviours. (Carillo et al., 2017). In other words, the framework of the entire dependence system changes as their reliance on media does. As a result, media dependence is not a straightforward, one-way phenomenon. Instead, there is a symbiotic interaction between the populace, the media, and the social structure (Lee & Choi, 2018).

Prior studies on social media use frequently made the assumption that people could limit their access to social media platforms according to their needs or aims (Patwardhan, 2003). These studies, however, ignored the interactions between the people and the media and instead focused on individuals as the object of investigation. In other words, current research does not address in details why people rely on these mediums to access the resources they need to achieve their objectives. The Media Dependency theory elaborates the dependence linkages in between the platform and the user giving a more thorough theoretical framework for researching people's social media usage behaviour.

The dependence linkages between people, groups, and organizations in the media system are complexly conceptualized by Media Dependency theory (Carillo et al., 2017; Loges, 1994). At the individual level, there is a connection in which an

individuals' ability to achieve their goals is dependent on the digital materials on the media (Ball-Rokeach, 1985). The incentives for pursuing goals at the micro level of interactions built on Media Dependency are described in the media (Chiu et al., 2014). According to Media Dependency, people must rely on the media to get information resources and so accomplish their varied aims and particular users' social media usage patterns. (Chiu et al., 2014; Patwardhan et al., 2003)

In communication research, the Media Dependency theory has been used to study dependence relationships with mass media outlets as radio, newspapers, and television (Grant et al., 1991; Loges, 1994). Internet dependence interactions have been the subject of earlier empirical investigations. For instance, Patwardhan et al., (2003) discovered that online news reading and purchasing behaviours were highly impacted by internet dependence relations, whereas online chatting was unaffected.

The more recent hypothetical research has concentrated on people's behaviour in the settings of social network services through the integration of the Media Dependency theory in the uses and gratifications theory (Chiu et al., 2014). The Media Dependency Theory aligns with the findings of the study on international students' experiences in TRNC during the COVID-19 pandemic in several ways:

a). **Media as a Primary Source of Communication:** The theory posits that individuals and communities become increasingly dependent on media for information and communication when traditional means are disrupted. This aligns with the findings that international students heavily relied on social media platforms as their primary source of communication during the pandemic. With lockdowns and restrictions in place, students turned to social media to stay connected, informed, and engaged.

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b). Language Barrier and Translation Services: Media Dependency Theory recognizes that media can help overcome language barriers by providing translation services. In the study, participants noted that social media platforms like WhatsApp integrated translation services, allowing them to communicate effectively despite language differences. This highlights how media dependency can address language-related challenges in times of crisis.

c). Social Media for Information Dissemination: The theory emphasizes that media serves as a key source of information during crises. The study's findings support this by indicating that social media played a crucial role in conveying accurate information to international students. It helped them stay informed about the pandemic's developments, government guidelines, and local practices, aiding in their adaptation process.

d). Building Social Connections: Media Dependency Theory suggests that media can facilitate the formation of social bonds. In the study, social media platforms were instrumental in fostering social connections among international students. They used these platforms to engage with peers, ask questions, and share experiences, which aligns with the theory's premise that media helps individuals connect with others.

e). Reducing Stereotypes and Enhancing Understanding: The theory acknowledges that media can influence perceptions and reduce stereotypes by providing exposure to different cultures and perspectives. In the study, proactive use of social media before arrival helped some students gain insights into the Turkish culture, mitigating potential stereotypes. Additionally, social media allowed students to explore and learn about their new environment, fostering better understanding.

Overall, the Media Dependency Theory aligns with the study's findings by illustrating how media, particularly social media, becomes a lifeline for individuals in crisis situations. It serves as a means of communication, information dissemination, social connection, and cultural understanding, all of which were essential components of international students' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic in TRNC.

2.9.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory

The uses and gratifications theory is a mass communication theory that emphasizes the fulfilment that media users derive from the contents they consume. This theory describes how media users seek out specific media contents to meet predefined needs. In contrast to previous approaches, it places more emphasis on *what people do with these contents* rather than *what the media does to them*. This theory was an improvement on several other theories that viewed media users as passive recipients of whatever is being projected towards them. For social media users during the COVID-19 lockdown, this theory is accurate. There was already a pre-defined need before they looked onto the micro-blogging app to derive gratifications.

Everyone needed to find alternatives to their regular social interactions outside the four walls of their houses, which they were now forcibly imprisoned in. As the reality of the lockdown dawned ragingly, all social media networking sites saw a surge in interaction consequently. As a result of this recent development, the well-known micro blogging website, twitter for example, had its highest daily usage ever because inactive users began to reactivate their accounts as more people joined in. Social media's increased popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic accurately represented the idea of uses and gratifications. It was obvious from the dramatic rise in social media users during the lockdown that the satisfaction desired was received,

and as a result, they not only persisted but also established mechanisms that encouraged participation from others. Humans are notorious for the manner in which they recruit others for whatever cause they have explored and certified.

When media users seek gratifications from a media source (content) and obtain it, they will inevitably mobilize the participation of others. These media users got drawn to different social media platforms for a variety of reasons, and when their needs were met there, they became repeat consumers as well as advertisers (when a good or service is pleasing, we tend to promote it impulsively). Customers evolve into marketers when the desired expectations are fulfilled, which is undoubtedly one of the reasons why there was a dramatic influx of users to these platforms during the lockdown period.

This theory aims to investigate the reasons why people consume media contents. According to Perry (2002), these reasons or motives may include such things as passing time and learning about things or oneself, as well as for arousal, relaxation, companionship, and because of habit. There is a theoretical tradition known as the "uses and gratifications approach" that dates back 70 years (e.g., Blumler, 1979; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Palmgreen, 1983). It implies that viewers do not automatically accept media content. Instead, Saunders et al., (2001) found that people actively try to use media content to further their objectives and interests.

According to the Uses and Gratifications theory, people consciously employ the use of social media in a bid to satisfy particular wants and desires. In this situation, international university students utilized social media to find friends, keep in touch with relatives in their native countries, obtain information, and deal with the

difficulties that the pandemic brought with it. For international students in these historically unusual times, social media offered a medium of contact, integration, and progressive intercultural adaptation.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section is made up of five parts that cover the technique and procedure used in this research; It encompasses the research framework, resources utilized, sample techniques, data acquisition techniques, and the credibility of the research. By using the instance of the COVID-19 pandemic, this study seeks to evaluate the impact of social media on communication, integration and intercultural adaptation of international students in crisis situations. This study seeks to answer the following research questions;

1. What adjustment challenges (i.e., cultural shock) did international students face when they came to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)?

2. In what ways did the COVID-19 pandemic affect communication of international students in TRNC?

3. In what ways did the COVID-19 pandemic affect integration and intercultural adaptation of international students in TRNC?

4. In what ways did the use of social media contribute in helping international students deal with communication related issues during the COVID-19 pandemic?

5. In what ways did the use of social media contribute in helping international students deal with integration and intercultural adaptation challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic?

6. Is social media an effective tool in ensuring the continuance of communication among international students during crisis situations like the COVID-19 pandemic?

7. Is social media an effective tool in facilitating integration and intercultural adaptation among international students during crisis situations like the COVID-19 pandemic?

3.1 Research Design

A combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques was used in obtaining primary data from respondents. 313 International university students from Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU), Cyprus International University (CIU), European University of Lefke (EUL) and Cyprus Science University (CSU) were given questionnaires to fill. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted on 10 international university students studying at these institutions of higher learning. The research was conducted within a period of one month and the data that was gathered was put together and analyzed in Chapter 4. Prior to the start of this research, a pilot test on 10 students chosen at random from Eastern Mediterranean University was undertaken to assess the questionnaire's clarity and relevance. Before distributing the surveys, the researcher submitted an application to the ethics committee board for permission.

After receiving permission from the Ethics board, the research was conducted and the resulting data was loaded into the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) for analysis.

3.2 Data Collection Method

The qualitative approach of focus group interviews was employed to acquire detailed data for the purpose of this research. The study's research questions were used as guidelines for the interviews. For this study, a quantitative approach of data acquisition via questionnaire surveys was applied. Prior to the main research survey, a preliminary examination was conducted, involving a purposively chosen sample of 10 students from Eastern Mediterranean University.

This approach was employed to ensure clarity within the accessible population. The primary survey form consisted of 48 questions and was delivered to 313 international university students at the four selected universities: EMU, EUL CSU, and CIU. To save time, the study was reverted to the traditional snowballing methods as responses were extremely slow in the initial phase conducted virtually. Questionnaires were distributed by hand to students by the researcher in the above mentioned universities. A total of 25 questionnaires had already been filled online before the switch to manual handing out methods to save time.

3.2.1 Methods for Gathering Primary Data

The main instrument employed in this research is a survey based on questionnaires. A total of 313 survey questionnaires were disseminated utilizing the chain referral sampling approach (also known as snowball sampling) and the targeted sampling techniques (commonly referred to as purposive sampling).

They were distributed in person to students in these institutions and several interested participants rolled it over to their friends and colleagues.

The questionnaire has 48 questions divided into four sections. The questionnaire had 7 questions regarding demographics, 6 questions that tested the general use of social media by university students studying in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. 9 questions that tested the student's social media use during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and 25 Likert scale questions.

This segment was incorporated to evaluate participants' perspectives concerning the utilization of social media within crisis contexts, with a focus on their patterns of communication, assimilation, and adjustment throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus group interview was conducted on a total of 10 students from EMU, CIU, CSU and EUL. 4 students from EMU, 4 students from CIU, and 2 students from EUL and CSU. Interview Questions were prepared in line with the Research Questions and their feedbacks were audio recorded and transcribed.

3.3 Sampling Procedure

In this study, both purposive (selective) and snowball sampling techniques were utilized. A selective sample is utilized with the researcher's understanding of the suitable population for the study; it also economizes the researcher's time. "A non-random sample selected based on population attributes and the study's goal." "Judgmental, selective, or subjective selection are all terms used to describe purposive sampling."(Crossman & Nicki, 2018).

Using the snowball sampling technique, respondents were employed to recommend others, making the survey faster and more adaptable to both the researcher and the participants. According to TRNC's Ministry of National Education and Culture

(2022), there was a substantial rise in the number of international students, reaching a total of 12,500 during the academic year 2021-2022.

This survey research employed the snowball and purposive sampling methodologies, thereby yielding a representative subset of the extensive cohort of international learners enrolled in TRNC. The intended composition of a focus group interview initially aimed to include a total of twelve participants. However, the actual participation yielded a smaller cohort, consisting of only ten individuals.

Notably, this group comprised nine participants hailing from Sub-Saharan Africa and a sole representative from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. It is imperative to emphasize that the underrepresentation of MENA participants in this study was entirely unintentional, as multiple invitations had been extended to students from diverse geographical regions. Unfortunately, a substantial portion of these invitations was met with declinations, ultimately influencing the final composition of the focus group.

The discrepancy in regional representation within this focus group warrants careful consideration when interpreting the findings and implications of the study. While the selection bias was not intentional, the study's outcomes may still be influenced by the skewed regional distribution of participants. It is essential to acknowledge that this may introduce a potential limitation, as perspectives and experiences within the MENA region may differ significantly from those in Sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, researchers and readers should approach the study's outcomes with a nuanced understanding of the participant demographics, recognizing the unintentional

limitations imposed by the challenges in securing a more diverse representation of students from the MENA region.

3.4 Research's Validity and Reliability

Integrity and authenticity in any study rely on concepts fitting in with reality as it is. The authenticity of the inquiry being examined explores how societal actuality is assessed via the questionnaire and how it aligns with the notion that the researcher is familiar with. A questionnaire with 48 items was distributed to 313 International university students in four major universities across North Cyprus for the quantitative approach of this study, and the gathered data was entered and subjected to analysis using SPSS version 18.

Table 3.4: Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha
Pilot Study	.991
Main Study	.896

Before the main survey, a preliminary test was conducted with 20 questionnaires to make sure that the inquiries were easily understood. These 20 individuals were chosen at random from among international university students. The reliability statistics indicates that the pilot study and the main research data sets are both extremely valuable and dependable. The data from the table shows that the pilot study's Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.99, whereas for the main study, it was 0.896. These high alpha coefficients imply that the data gathered for the study may be regarded as trustworthy.

Additionally, all of the tests used in the study had Cronbach's alpha coefficient results that were above 0.7 which is regarded as satisfactory and denotes a high level of internal consistency. This suggests that the study's questionnaire is trustworthy, and the information gathered from the respondents is reliable and consistent.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the numerical analysis concerning the information collected from the participants is presented. The primary goal of these analyses is twofold: to provide adequate answers to the research questions that were posed at the outset of the study and to pave the way for future discussions and interpretations of the results. Not only will descriptive statistics of the outcomes be presented, but also a demographic analysis will be conducted to gain a better understanding of the characteristics of the respondents.

The demographic study will concentrate on understanding the respondents' characteristics such as age, gender, educational background, and other relevant demographics. This information is critical since it may assist in contextualising the findings and assess their generalizability to a broader population.

Overall, this chapter is critical to the research process since it gives a thorough examination of the data and insights into the important results shedding light on the patterns and trends seen in the data by giving both descriptive and inferential statistics. Furthermore, the demographic analysis will help in the understanding of the sample's makeup and any biases that might impact the results. Ultimately, the statistical and demographic analysis given in this chapter provides a framework for the interpretation and discussion of the findings of this study.

They pave the way for relevant conclusions, implications, and suggestions based on the facts, which can add to the current body of knowledge and offer up new paths for future study in the subject.

4.1 Demographics

Respondents were asked demographic questions such as their geographical region, age, gender, university they attend, educational level, academic year of study, and marital status. The frequency distribution tables and associated analysis are shown below.

Table 4.1: What geographical region are you from?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Iran	16	5.1	5.1	5.1
	Turkey	49	15.7	15.7	20.8
	Sub-Saharan Africa	168	53.7	53.7	74.4
	Middle East and North Africa	40	12.8	12.8	87.2
	Europe	7	2.2	2.2	89.5
	Asia	29	9.3	9.3	98.7
	Caucasus	4	1.3	1.3	100
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

According to the replies from the sample population, Sub-Saharan Africa had the highest number of respondents (168, representing 53.7%). Turkey accounted for 15.7% of the total, with 49 responses, followed by Middle East and North Africa (40 respondents, 12.8%), Asia (29 respondents, 9.3%), Iran (16 respondents, 5.1%), Europe (7 respondents, 2.2%) and The Caucasus (4 respondents, 1.3%). This gap was not intentional in any way, but it may be explained by the fact that the questionnaires were distributed by the traditional snowballing method. It is critical to emphasize that

questionnaires were distributed to students on the basis of their willingness to participate. Those who participated then referred their friends and colleagues.

It is important to note that the study had a remarkably high degree of involvement from university students hailing from Sub-Saharan Africa, which contributed to the unusually high sample size. The astounding readiness of students from Sub-Saharan Africa to take part in this study demonstrates their active participation and enthusiasm in contributing to the research. Their enormous participation emphasizes the importance of their opinions in molding the conclusions of this inquiry. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of including a variety of voices and perspectives in the investigation of research problems.

Seeing that purposive sampling allows for focused recruitment of certain populations, it may present limits in terms of generalizability. In view of this, the findings of this study should be evaluated with the peculiar characteristics of the sampled group in mind, since they may not be immediately relevant to the general population.

Finally, the significant level of involvement from international university students from Sub-Saharan Africa, along with the purposeful sample approach based on their status as foreign students, gives unique insights and adds depth to this research. It demonstrates the importance of volunteer participation in contributing to scholarly research on the issue.

Table 4.2: What is your age?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	16 to 20	65	20.8	20.8	20.8
	21 to 25	176	56.2	56.2	77.0
	26 to 30	56	17.9	17.9	94.9
	above 31	16	5.1	5.1	100.0

According to table 4.2, the most prominent age group was 21-25 years old, with 176 people completing the survey from this age range, representing 56.2% of the total sample, followed by 16-20 years, with 65 respondents representing 20.8%, 26-30 years, with 56 respondents representing 17.9%, and 31 years and above, with 16 respondent representing 5.1%. This means that the age range of 21-25 years had the largest percentage of students.

Table 4.3: What is your gender?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	141	45.0	45.0	45.0
	Male	172	55.0	55.0	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

According to the statistics in table 4.3 above on the gender of respondents, 172 respondents (55.0%) were male, while 141 respondents (45.0%) were female. There is a clear evidence of a larger proportion of male respondents than female respondents. This gap was not intentional. It is critical to emphasize that the dispersion of questionnaires to international students was totally dependent on their voluntary participation in this research.

The resultant male to female participant ratio is not a result of the purposive sampling approach used. Purposive sampling technique was chosen to include a specific category of interest, namely international students, this implies that participant selection was devoid of gender-based criteria, with the sole prerequisite being their status as international students. The rationale behind the adoption of this method was to collect a broad spectrum of opinions and cultural perspectives, aiming to enhance the overall quality and depth of the research findings.

Table 4.4: What university do you attend?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	CIU	54	17.3	17.3	17.3
	CSU	81	25.9	25.9	43.1
	EMU	86	27.5	27.5	70.6
	EUL	92	29.4	29.4	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Because the respondents are dispersed throughout the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, table 4.4 displays the universities where the university students are now enrolled.

According to the results, Cyprus International University (CIU) had 54 respondents (17.3%), Cyprus Science University (CSU) had 81 respondents (25.9%), Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) had 86 respondents (27.5%), and European University of Lefke (EUL) had 92 respondents (29.4%).

Table 4.5: What is your educational level?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Master Student	70	22.4	22.4	22.4
	PhD Student	14	4.5	4.5	26.8
	Undergradu ate Student	229	73.2	73.2	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.5 indicates that the highest amount of responses were received from undergraduate students (229 representing 73.2%), followed by those in the Master program (70 representing 22.4%), and just 14 representing 4.5% were PhD students. There is a wide gap between the undergraduate population and others but it has no major influence on the conclusion of the study's findings.

Table 4.6: What is your academic year of study in the university?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	First Year	29	9.3	9.3	9.3
	Second Year	164	23.3	23.3	32.6
	Third Year	47	52.4	52.4	85.0
	Fourth Year	73	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.6 indicates that the highest amounts of responses were received from students in their second year (164, representing 52.4%). Majority of those in second year were undergraduate international students that had to go through a mandatory English Preparatory school before the commencement of their respective degree

programs. The preparatory program is a compulsory study period of 6 months to 1 year dedicated to the study of English language for international students and indigenes who prefer to be taught in English, rather than Turkish. It is mandatory for international students from all nationalities with the exception of a few who have written internationally recognized "Test of English" exams.

This implies that undergraduate students in their second year are oftentimes in their fourth, fifth or sixth semester which directly translates to them being on the island within the period of this research. This was closely followed by those in their Fourth year (73, representing 23.3%), third year (47, representing 15.0%) and lastly 29 representing a 9.3% were in their first year.

Table 4.7: What is your marital status?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Dating	1	.3	.3	.3
	Engaged	2	.6	.6	1.0
	Married	17	5.4	5.4	6.4
	Single	293	93.6	93.6	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.7 shows that 293 respondents which makes up 93.6% of the total feedback derived were single. 17 respondents, representing 5.4% were married. An "other" category was provided under this question, and 3 respondents selected this category. 2 respondents out of these 3, representing 0.6% were engaged and 1 respondent, representing 0.3% was dating.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis for Social Media Use

Table 4.8: Do you have user accounts on any social media platforms?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	313	100.0	100.0	100.0
	No	-	-	-	-
	Total	313	10.0	100.0	

As shown in table 4.8, when questioned as to whether they have social media accounts, all respondents agreed. This is demonstrated by the fact that all 313 respondents are represented giving rise to a 100%. This suggests that, because all of the students who participated in this poll are active on various social media platforms, it is possible that social media plays a significant role in their lives.

Table 4.9: How many user accounts do you have?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	40	12.8	12.8	12.8
	2	48	15.3	15.3	28.1
	3	73	23.3	23.3	51.4
	4	79	25.2	25.2	76.7
	5 and above	73	23.3	23.3	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.9 captures the number of social media platforms that the respondents utilise. A total of 79 respondents making up 25.2% of the total indicated that they use 4 of these platforms. Those who use 3 of these platforms, as well as those who use 5 and above were a total of 73 respondents making up 23.3% each. 48 respondents representing 15.3% use 2, and 40 respondents representing 12.8% use just 1.

Table 4.10: Which of the following accounts is your favourite or you use the most?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Discord	1	.3	.3	.3
	Facebook	20	6.4	6.4	6.7
	Instagram	103	32.9	32.9	39.6
	No Favorite	2	.6	.6	40.3
	Snapchat	6	1.9	1.9	42.2
	TikTok	24	7.7	7.7	49.8
	Twitter	27	8.6	8.6	58.5
	WhatsApp	105	33.5	33.5	92.0
	YouTube	25	8.0	8.0	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.10 shows the social media platforms that respondents in this survey often utilize. According to the findings, 105 participants (33.5%) indicated that they use WhatsApp the most, 103 (32.9%) indicated that they use Instagram the most, 27 (8.6%) indicated they use Twitter the most, 25 (8.0%) indicated they use YouTube the most, 24 (7.7%) indicated that they use TikTok the most, 20 (6.4%) indicated that they use Facebook the most, 6 (1.9%) indicated they use Snapchat the most, 2 (.6%) indicated they had no favorites, and 1 (.3%) indicated that they use Discord the most. As a result, among the participants, WhatsApp was dubbed to be the most popular social media network.

Table 4.11: What technological device do you use the most?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Android tablets	14	4.5	4.5	4.5
	iPad	12	3.8	3.8	8.3
	Laptop	39	12.5	12.5	20.8
	Mobile phone	248	79.2	79.2	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

In Table 4.11, 248 respondents (79.2%) claimed that they use a mobile phone, 39 respondents (12.5%) use a Laptop, 14 respondents (4.5%) use an Android Tablet, and 12 respondents (3.8%) use an iPad.

Based on the data presented above, it can be observed that mobile phones are the most commonly used technological device, primarily due to their pronounced ergonomic advantage of portability and ease of carriage.

Table 4.12: How many hours do you spend on social media daily?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-2 hours	62	19.8	19.8	19.8
	3-4 hours	102	32.6	32.6	52.4
	5-6 hours	71	22.7	22.7	75.1
	7 hours and over	65	20.8	20.8	95.8
	Less than one hour	13	4.2	4.2	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

According to the responses in table 4.12, the largest chunk of students, 102 (32.6%), spend 3-4 hours per day on social media, followed by 71 (22.7%) who spend 5-6 hours per day, 65 (20.8%) spend 7 hours and above per day, 62 (9.8%) spend 1-2 hours per day, and 13 (4.2%) spend less than 1 hour per day.

As a result, the overall amount of hours the students spend on social media is way above average, with 75% agreeing to have spent between 1 and 6 hours on social media daily and 20.8% spending above 7 hours.

Table 4.13: Why do you use social media?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	To share information	12	3.8	3.8	3.8
	To look for information	73	23.3	23.3	27.2
	To socialize	18	5.8	5.8	32.9
	For entertainment and leisure	51	16.3	16.3	49.2
	To stay updated with current affairs	157	50.2	50.2	99.4
	To study and work	2	.6	.6	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.13 displays the responses to the question of why respondents utilized social media. Based on the results, 157 (50.2%) of the respondents used social media to stay updated with current affairs, 73 respondents (23.3%) used it to look for information, 51 respondents (16.3%) used social media for entertainment and leisure, 18 respondents (5.8%) used it to socialize, 12 respondents (3.8%) used it to share information, and 2 respondents (.6%) used social media to study and work. Consequently, a significant proportion of respondents (77.3%) employed social media for information retrieval and dissemination, probably discovering a few educational resources in the process, but only .6% actively set out in the utilization of social media for study and work.

4.3 Descriptive Analysis for the Usage of Social Media during the COVID-19 pandemic

Table 4.14: Have you been exposed to the use of social media platforms for educational purposes before the COVID-19 pandemic?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	81	25.9	25.9	25.9
	Yes	232	74.1	74.1	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

From table 4.14, 232 respondents (74.1%) indicated that they had been exposed to the use of social media for educational purposes before the COVID-19 pandemic, while 81 respondents (25.9%) indicated that they had not been exposed to the use of social media prior to the pandemic. Hence, it is clear that a significantly high number of students are already used to learning with the aid of social media platforms.

Table 4.15: If your answer in question (14) is yes, was learning with the aid of these social media platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic same as the time before?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	129	55.6	55.6	55.6
	Yes	103	44.4	44.4	100.0
	Total	232	100.0	100.0	

According to table 4.15, 129 respondents amounting to 55.6% of those that stated that they had been exposed to the use of social media for educational purposes prior to the pandemic, indicated that learning with the aid of these platforms was different

during the COVID-19 pandemic. The other 103 respondents amounting to 44.4% indicated that it was the same for them.

Table 4.16: If your answer in question (14) is no, was adjusting to taking classes and tests on social media platforms easy for you?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	40	49.4	49.4	49.4
	Yes	41	50.6	50.6	100.0
	Total	81	100.0	100.0	

According to table 4.16, 41 respondents making up to 50.6% of those that stated that they had not been exposed to the use of social media for educational purposes prior to the pandemic, indicated that it was easy adapting to the use of these platforms. The other 40 respondents amounting to 49.4% indicated that it was difficult adjusting to the use of these platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4.17: Which learning model would you prefer for educational purposes?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Blended model (i.e., physical classes combined with online tasks, assignment).	14	4.5	4.5	4.5
	Hybrid model (i.e., an interplay between physical and online classes).	152	48.6	48.6	53.0
	Online learning model	50	16.0	16.0	69.0
	Traditional classroom model	97	31.0	31.0	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

From the data collected in table 4.17, students preferred the Hybrid model for educational purposes as 152 respondents, making up 48.6% of the total number of respondents indicated their preference for this model. It was followed by 97 respondents (31.0%) who preferred the traditional classroom model, 50 respondents (16.0%) who preferred the online learning model and lastly, 14 respondents (4.5%) who preferred the blended learning model. During the pandemic, the hybrid model of learning was preferred because it provided a flexible and adaptive approach to continuing education while meeting the obstacles faced by the global health challenge.

With the pandemic requiring physical separation and sporadic school closures, the hybrid approach enabled educational institutions to integrate in-person and online training. This method allowed students to attend selected classes in a controlled, socially separated environment while receiving the remainder of the curriculum and learning tools online.

The hybrid model guaranteed continuity in education by harnessing technology, allowing students to actively participate in their coursework from the comfort of their homes during times of increased health risks or constraints. Furthermore, the hybrid model allowed educators to adjust their lessons to meet individual student's requirements, encouraging a more personalised learning experience amidst the pandemic's uncertainty.

Table 4.18: What other area of your life did the lock down protocol affect?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Emotional balance	110	35.1	35.1	35.1
	Social ties	30	9.6	9.6	44.7
	Mental health	50	16.0	16.0	60.7
	Disruption of daily routine	99	31.6	31.6	92.3
	Academic achievement	18	5.8	5.8	98.1
	Comprehension and focus	2	.6	.6	98.7
	Not affected	2	.6	.6	99.4
	Economic balance	2	.6	.6	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

From table 4.18, it can be deduced that emotional imbalance was one of the major impacts of the lockdown as indicated by 110 respondents (35.1%). 99 respondents (31.6%) stated that their daily routine was disrupted. 50 respondents (16.0%) pointed out that the lockdown protocol had more impact on their mental health. 30 respondents (9.6%) stated that it tampered with their social interactions. 18 respondents (5.8%) indicated that their academic achievement was affected. 2 respondents (.6%) stated that it affected their comprehension and focus, 2 respondents (.6%) stated that it affected their economic balance and the last 2 respondents (.6%) stated that they were not in the least affected by the lockdown protocol.

Table 4.19: Did the area(s) listed in question (18) have any direct impact on your communication?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	133	42.5	42.5	42.5
	Yes	180	57.5	57.5	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

According to table 4.19, 180 respondents (57.5%) indicated that the areas listed in table 4.18 (i.e., emotional imbalance, social ties disruption, mental health strain, disruption of daily routines, strain on academic achievement, loss of focus and slow comprehension and economic imbalance) impacted on the international student's ability to communicate properly. On the other hand, 133 respondents (42.5%) indicated that the areas listed above had no impact on their communication process.

Table 4.20: Did the area(s) listed in question (18) have any direct impact on your intercultural adaptation process?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	134	42.8	42.8	42.8
	Yes	179	57.2	57.2	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

According to table 4.20, 179 respondents (57.2%) indicated that the areas listed in table 4.18 (i.e., emotional imbalance, social ties disruption, mental health strain, disruption of daily routines, strain on academic achievement, loss of focus and slow comprehension and economic imbalance) impacted on the international student's ability to adapt to the culture of their host community properly. On the other hand, 134 respondents (42.8%) indicated that the areas listed above had no impact on their intercultural adaptation process.

Table 4.21: Did the use of social media assist in reorganizing your disrupted daily routine during the COVID-19 pandemic?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	106	33.9	33.9	33.9
	Yes	207	66.1	66.1	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

According to table 4.21, 207 respondents (66.1%) indicated that during the COVID-19 pandemic, social media helped them in reconstructing their disrupted daily routines. On the other hand, 106 respondents (33.9%) indicated that there was no significant contribution from social media in the reorganization of their daily routines.

Table 4.22: Did you at any point during the COVID-19 pandemic feel like you were becoming too dependent on social media in achieving your daily routines?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	96	30.7	30.7	30.7
	Yes	217	69.3	69.3	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

In table 4.22, 217 respondents, making up 69.3% of the total feedbacks received indicated that at some point during the pandemic, they realized an extreme dependence on social media in the achievement of their daily goals and projections. The other 96 respondents (30.7%) indicated that they never felt too dependent on social media throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This implies that throughout the pandemic, many students relied heavily on social media to complete their daily tasks and achieve their set goals. This emphasises social media's revolutionary function as a critical tool for communication, access to information, and staying connected, particularly during times of crisis. It also implies that the pandemic's unique conditions may have expedited the integration of social media into different elements of students' life, emphasising the pandemic's potential influence on their academic and personal endeavours. Further study and analysis, however, would be necessary to properly comprehend the implications and potential

ramifications of this growing reliance on social media in the context of education and well-being.

4.4 Analysis of Likert Scale Questions

Table 4.23: Social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc.) are very popular among international students.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	8	2.6	2.6	2.6
	Disagree	1	.3	.3	2.9
	Undecided	6	1.9	1.9	4.8
	Agree	42	13.4	13.4	18.2
	Strongly Agree	256	81.8	81.8	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.23 indicates findings from respondents on whether social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc.) are very popular among international students. Based on the results, 8 respondents (2.6%) expressed strong disagreement, 1 respondent (.3%) held a stance of disagreement, 6 respondents (1.9%) exhibited uncertainty, 42 respondents (13.4%) showed agreement, while a significant majority of 256 respondents (81.8%) strongly concurred with the statement.

Consequently, these findings have successfully proven that social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc.) are very popular among international university students in TRNC.

Table 4.24: Students use social media platforms to connect with other students.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	5	1.6	1.6	1.6
	Disagree	13	4.2	4.2	5.8
	Undecided	22	7.0	7.0	12.8
	Agree	85	27.2	27.2	39.9
	Strongly Agree	188	60.1	60.1	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.24 shows the responses to the question that seeks to find out if students use social media platforms to connect with other students. Based on the results,5 respondents (1.6%) held a stance of strong disagreement, 13 respondents (4.2%) expressed disagreement, 22 respondents (7.0%) exhibited uncertainty, 85 respondents (27.2%) showed agreement, while a substantial number of 188 respondents (60.1%) strongly concurred with the statement. Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that students studying in the TRNC indeed use social media platforms to connect with other students.

Table 4.25: International students use social media platforms to connect with their families and friends abroad.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	5	1.6	1.6	1.6
	Disagree	-	-	-	-
	Undecided	14	4.5	4.5	6.1
	Agree	65	20.8	20.8	26.8
	Strongly Agree	229	73.2	73.2	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.25 shows the responses to the question that seeks to find out if international students use social media platforms to connect with their families and friends abroad. Based on the results, 5 participants (1.6%) held a stance of strong disagreement, 14 respondents (4.5%) exhibited uncertainty, 65 individuals (20.8%) showed agreement, while a substantial number of 229 respondents (73.2%) strongly concurred with the statement. Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that international students indeed use social media platforms to connect with their families and friends abroad.

Table 4.26: Students use social media platforms to connect with their tutors.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	9	2.9	2.9	2.9
	Disagree	29	9.3	9.3	12.1
	Undecided	49	15.7	15.7	27.8
	Agree	116	37.1	37.1	64.9
	Strongly Agree	110	35.1	35.1	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.26 shows the responses to the question that seeks to find out if students use social media platforms to connect with their tutors. Based on the results, 9 respondents (2.9%) held a stance of strong disagreement, 29 respondents (9.3%) expressed disagreement, 49 respondents (15.7%) exhibited uncertainty, 116 respondents (37.1%) showed agreement, while a notable count of 110 respondents (35.1%) strongly concurred with the statement.

Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that international students indeed use social media platforms to connect with their tutors.

Table 4.27: The use of social media makes the process of learning easy, flexible and fun.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	5	1.6	1.6	1.6
	Disagree	17	5.4	5.4	7.0
	Undecided	50	16.0	16.0	23.0
	Agree	115	36.7	36.7	59.7
	Strongly Agree	126	40.3	40.3	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.27 shows the responses to the question that seeks to find out if the use of social media makes the process of learning easy, flexible and fun. Based on the results, 5 respondents (1.6%) held a stance of strong disagreement, 17 respondents (5.4%) expressed disagreement, 50 respondents (16.0%) exhibited uncertainty, 115 respondents (36.7%) showed agreement, while a notable number of 126 respondents (40.3%) strongly concurred with the statement.

Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that the use of social media makes the process of learning easy, flexible and fun.

Table 4.28: The need of social media in teaching and learning is important and undeniable in universities.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	6	1.9	1.9	1.9
	Disagree	15	4.8	4.8	6.7
	Undecided	41	13.1	13.1	19.8
	Agree	130	41.5	41.5	61.3
	Strongly Agree	121	38.7	38.7	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.28 shows the responses to the question that seeks to find out whether the need of social media in teaching and learning is important and undeniable in universities. Based on the results,6 respondents (1.9%) held a position of strong disagreement, 15 respondents (4.8%) conveyed disagreement, 41 respondents (13.1%) displayed uncertainty, 130 respondents (41.5%) indicated agreement, while a notable number of 121 respondents (38.7%) strongly concurred with the statement. Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that the need of social media in teaching and learning is important and undeniable in universities.

Table 4.29: The lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic affected face to face communication.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	9	2.9	2.9	2.9
	Disagree	26	8.3	8.3	11.2
	Undecided	78	24.9	24.9	36.1
	Agree	92	29.4	29.4	65.5
	Strongly Agree	108	34.5	34.5	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.29 shows the responses to the question that seeks to find out whether the lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic affected face to face communication. Based on the results, 9 participants (2.9%) held a stance of strong disagreement, 26 respondents (8.3%) expressed disagreement, 78 respondents (24.9%) exhibited uncertainty, 92 respondents (29.4%) showed agreement, while a considerable number of 108 respondents (34.5%) strongly concurred with the statement. Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that the lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic

affected face to face communication of International university students studying in the TRNC.

Table 4.30: The lockdown during the COVID 19 pandemic affected the comprehension and focus of international students.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	6	1.9	1.9	1.9
	Disagree	7	2.2	2.2	4.2
	Undecided	29	9.3	9.3	13.4
	Agree	81	25.9	25.9	39.3
	Strongly Agree	190	60.7	60.7	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.30 shows the responses to the question that seeks to find out whether the lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic affected the comprehension and focus of international students. Based on the results, 6 respondents (1.9%) held a perspective of strong disagreement, 7 respondents (2.2%) expressed disagreement, 29 respondents (9.3%) demonstrated uncertainty, 81 respondents (25.9%) indicated agreement, while a significant number of 190 respondents (60.7%) strongly concurred with the statement.

Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that the lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic affected the comprehension and focus of international students in the TRNC.

Table 4.31: The lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic affected the emotional balance of international students.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	5	1.6	1.6	1.6
	Disagree	9	2.9	2.9	4.5
	Undecided	42	13.4	13.4	17.9
	Agree	98	31.3	31.3	49.2
	Strongly agree	159	50.8	50.8	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.31 shows the responses to the question that seeks to find out whether the lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic affected the emotional balance of international students. Based on the results, 5 respondents (1.6%) held a stance of strong disagreement, 9 respondents (2.9%) expressed disagreement, 42 respondents (13.4%) exhibited uncertainty, 98 respondents (31.3%) showed agreement, while a substantial number of 159 respondents (50.8%) strongly concurred with the statement.

Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that the lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic affected the emotional balance of international students studying in the TRNC.

Table 4.32: The COVID-19 pandemic was characterized by feelings of depression and despondency.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	9	2.9	2.9	2.9
	Disagree	15	4.8	4.8	7.7
	Undecided	60	19.2	19.2	26.8
	Agree	99	31.6	31.6	58.5
	Strongly Agree	130	41.5	41.5	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.32 shows the responses to the question that seeks to find out whether the COVID-19 pandemic was characterized by feelings of depression and despondency. Based on the results, 9 respondents (2.9%) maintained a standpoint of strong disagreement, 15 respondents (4.8%) expressed disagreement, 60 respondents (19.2%) displayed uncertainty, 99 respondents (31.6%) indicated agreement, while a considerable number of 130 respondents (41.5%) strongly concurred with the statement.

Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that the COVID-19 pandemic was characterized by feelings of depression and despondency for international students studying in the TRNC.

Table 4.33: International students had issues adjusting to their new environment because of the restriction in movement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	3	1.0	1.0	1.0
	Disagree	5	1.6	1.6	2.6
	Undecided	36	11.5	11.5	14.1
	Agree	107	34.2	34.2	48.2
	Strongly Agree	162	51.8	51.8	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.33 shows the responses to the question that seeks to find out whether international students had issues adjusting to their new environment because of the restriction in movement during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the results, 3 respondents (1.0%) held a standpoint of strong disagreement, 5 respondents (1.6%) expressed disagreement, 36 respondents (11.5%) demonstrated uncertainty, 107 respondents (34.2%) displayed agreement, while a substantial count of 162

respondents (51.8%) strongly concurred with the assertion. Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that during the COVID-19 pandemic, international students studying in the TRNC had issues adjusting to their new environment because of the restriction in movement.

Table 4.34: International students in TRNC consider language barrier as a challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	4	1.3	1.3	1.3
	Disagree	9	2.9	2.9	4.2
	Undecided	43	13.7	13.7	17.9
	Agree	95	30.4	30.4	48.2
	Strongly Agree	162	51.8	51.8	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.34 shows the responses to the question that seeks to find out whether international students in TRNC consider language barrier as a challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the results, 4 respondents (1.3%) held a stance of strong disagreement, 9 respondents (2.9%) expressed disagreement, 43 respondents (13.7%) exhibited uncertainty, 95 respondents (30.4%) showed agreement, while a significant number of 162 respondents (51.8%) strongly concurred with the statement. Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that during the COVID-19 pandemic, international students in TRNC considered language barrier as a challenge.

Table 4.35: Social media was the primary source of communication during the COVID-19 pandemic.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	5	1.6	1.6	1.6
	Disagree	2	.6	.6	2.2
	Undecided	19	6.1	6.1	8.3
	Agree	80	25.6	25.6	33.9
	Strongly Agree	207	66.1	66.1	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.35 shows the responses to the question that seeks to find out social media was the primary source of communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the results, 5 participants (1.6%) held a stance of strong disagreement, 2 respondents (.6%) expressed disagreement, 19 individuals (6.1%) exhibited uncertainty, 80 participants (25.6%) showed agreement, while a substantial number of 207 respondents (66.1%) strongly concurred with the statement. Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that social media was the primary source of communication during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4.36: I used social media to stay updated with current affairs around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	7	2.2	2.2	2.2
	Disagree	5	1.6	1.6	3.8
	Undecided	15	4.8	4.8	8.6
	Agree	90	28.8	28.8	37.4
	Strongly Agree	196	62.6	62.6	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.36 shows the responses to the question 'I used social media to stay updated with current affairs around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic'. Based on the

results, 7 respondents (2.2%) held a stance of strong disagreement, 5 respondents (1.6%) expressed disagreement, 15 respondents (4.8%) exhibited uncertainty, 90 respondents (28.8%) showed agreement, while a significant number of 196 respondents (62.6%) strongly concurred with the statement. Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that international students studying in the TRNC used social media to stay updated with current affairs around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4.37: I used social media for entertainment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	4	1.3	1.3	1.3
	Disagree	4	1.3	1.3	2.6
	Undecided	25	8.0	8.0	10.5
	Agree	102	32.6	32.6	43.1
	Strongly Agree	178	56.9	56.9	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.37 shows the responses to the question 'I used social media for entertainment during the COVID-19 pandemic'. Based on the results, 4 respondents (1.3%) held a stance of strong disagreement, 4 respondents (1.3%) expressed disagreement, 25 respondents (8.0%) exhibited uncertainty, 102 respondents (32.6%) showed agreement, while a substantial number of 178 respondents (56.9%) strongly concurred with the statement. Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that international students studying in the TRNC used social media for entertainment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4.38: I used social media as a source of information during the COVID-19 pandemic.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	3	1.0	1.0	1.0
	Disagree	3	1.0	1.0	1.9
	Undecided	21	6.7	6.7	8.6
	Agree	110	35.1	35.1	43.8
	Strongly Agree	176	56.2	56.2	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.38 shows the responses to the question 'I used social media as a source of information during the COVID-19 pandemic'. Based on the results, 3 respondents (1.0%) strongly disagree, 3 respondents (1.0%) held a stance of strong disagreement, 3 respondents (1.0%) expressed disagreement, 21 respondents (6.7%) exhibited uncertainty, 110 respondents (35.1%) showed agreement, while a significant number of 176 respondents (56.2%) strongly concurred with the statement.

Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that international students studying in the TRNC used social media as a source of information during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4.39: I used social media to keep in touch with my family and friends in my home country during the COVID-19 pandemic.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	6	1.9	1.9	1.9
	Disagree	3	1.0	1.0	2.9
	Undecided	12	3.8	3.8	6.7
	Agree	76	24.3	24.3	31.0
	Strongly Agree	216	69.0	69.0	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.39 shows the responses to the question 'I used social media to keep in touch with my family and friends in my home country during the COVID-19 pandemic'. Based on the results, 6 participants (1.9%) held a stance of strong disagreement, 3 respondents (1.0%) expressed disagreement, 12 individuals (3.8%) exhibited uncertainty, 76 respondents (24.3%) showed agreement, while a considerable number of 216 respondents (69.0%) strongly concurred with the statement. Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that international students studying in the TRNC used social media to keep in touch with family and friends in their home country during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4.40: I used social media platforms and search engines (e.g., google translate) to communicate with people who don't speak English during the COVID-19 pandemic.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	10	3.2	3.2	3.2
	Disagree	8	2.6	2.6	5.8
	Undecided	26	8.3	8.3	14.1
	Agree	82	26.2	26.2	40.3
	Strongly Agree	187	59.7	59.7	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.40 shows the responses to the question 'I used social media platforms and search engines (e.g., google translate) to communicate with people who don't speak English during the COVID-19 pandemic'. Based on the results, 10 respondents (3.2%) held a position of strong disagreement, 8 respondents (2.6%) conveyed disagreement, 26 respondents (8.3%) expressed uncertainty, 82 respondents (26.2%) displayed agreement, while a considerable number of 187 respondents (59.7%) strongly endorsed the statement. Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that

international students studying in the TRNC used social media platforms and search engines (e.g., google translate) to communicate with people who don't speak English during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4.41: Social media was effective in ensuring the continuance of social interactions despite the lockdown.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	6	1.9	1.9	1.9
	Disagree	5	1.6	1.6	3.5
	Undecided	28	8.9	8.9	12.2
	Agree	92	29.4	29.4	41.7
	Strongly Agree	182	58.1	58.1	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.41 shows the responses to the question 'social media was effective in ensuring the continuance of social interactions despite the lockdown'. Based on the results, 6 respondents (1.9%) strongly disagreed, 5 respondents (1.6%) disagreed, 28 respondents (8.9%) remained undecided, 92 respondents (29.4%) showed agreement, while a substantial 182 respondents (58.1%) strongly concurred with the statement. Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that social media was effective in ensuring the continuance of social interactions despite the lockdown for international students studying in the TRNC.

Table 4.42: The use of social media was instrumental in solving the language barrier issue during the COVID-19 pandemic.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	7	2.2	2.2	2.2
	Disagree	12	3.8	3.8	6.1
	Undecided	43	13.7	13.5	19.6
	Agree	110	35.1	35.3	54.8
	Strongly Agree	141	45.0	45.2	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.42 shows the responses to the question 'The use of social media was instrumental in solving the language barrier issue during the COVID-19 pandemic'. Based on the result, 7 respondents (2.2%) held a stance of strong disagreement, 12 respondents (3.8%) expressed disagreement, 43 respondents (13.7%) exhibited uncertainty, 110 respondents (35.1%) showed agreement, while a considerable number of 141 respondents (45.0%) strongly concurred with the statement. Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that the use of social media was instrumental in solving the language barrier issue during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4.43: Social media helped in projecting relevant safety guidelines which aided in dispelling fear during the COVID-19 pandemic.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	7	2.2	2.2	2.2
	Disagree	12	3.8	3.8	6.1
	Undecided	43	13.7	13.7	19.6
	Agree	103	32.9	32.9	52.6
	Strongly Agree	148	47.3	47.3	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.43 shows the responses to the question 'Social media helped in projecting relevant safety guidelines which aided in dispelling fear during the COVID-19

pandemic'. Based on the results, 7 respondents (2.2%) held a stance of strong disagreement, 12 respondents (3.8%) expressed disagreement, 43 respondents (13.7%) exhibited uncertainty, 103 respondents (32.9%) showed agreement, while a substantial number of 148 respondents (47.3%) strongly concurred with the statement.

Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that social media helped in projecting relevant safety guidelines which aided in dispelling fear during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4.44: Communication over social media was effective in overcoming depression and despondency during the COVID-19 pandemic.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	5	1.6	1.6	1.6
	Disagree	16	5.1	5.1	6.7
	Undecided	56	17.9	17.9	24.4
	Agree	104	33.2	33.2	57.7
	Strongly Agree	132	42.2	42.2	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.44 shows the responses to the question 'Communication over social media was effective in overcoming depression and despondency during the COVID-19 pandemic'. Based on the results, 5 respondents (1.6%) held a stance of strong disagreement, 16 respondents (5.1%) expressed disagreement, 56 respondents (17.9%) exhibited uncertainty, 104 respondents (33.2%) showed agreement, while a significant number of 132 respondents (42.2%) strongly concurred with the statement.

Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that communication over social media was effective in overcoming depression and despondency during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4.45: Communication over social media was effective in overcoming feelings of isolation and creating a sense of belonging.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	9	2.9	2.9	2.9
	Disagree	11	3.5	3.5	6.4
	Undecided	37	11.8	11.8	17.9
	Agree	121	38.7	38.7	56.7
	Strongly Agree	135	43.1	43.1	100.0
	Total	312	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.45 shows the responses to the question 'Communication over social media was effective in overcoming feelings of isolation and creating a sense of belonging'. Based on the results, 9 respondents (2.9%) expressed strong disagreement, 11 respondents (3.5%) conveyed disagreement, 37 respondents (11.8%) remained uncertain, 121 respondents (38.7%) indicated agreement, while a notable number of 135 respondents (43.1%) strongly concurred with the statement. Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that communication over social media was effective in overcoming feelings of isolation and creating a sense of belonging.

Table 4.46: Social media played a strong role in igniting and nurturing new social contacts in TRNC during the COVID-19 pandemic.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	12	3.8	3.8	3.8
	Disagree	7	2.2	2.2	6.1
	Undecided	55	17.6	17.6	23.4
	Agree	113	36.1	36.1	59.6
	Strongly Agree	126	40.3	40.3	100.0
	Total	312	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.46 shows the responses to the question 'Social media played a strong role in igniting and nurturing new social contacts in TRNC during the COVID-19 pandemic'. Based on the results, 12 respondents (3.8%) strongly disagree, 7 respondents (2.2%) disagree, 55 respondents (17.6%) are undecided, 113 respondents (36.1%) agree, while 126 respondents (40.3%) strongly agree. Hence, the findings have substantiated that social media had a substantial part to play in initiating and fostering fresh social connections in TRNC amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4.47: I felt more at home in TRNC because I had access to information through social media that helped me adjust quickly to the new environment.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	27	8.6	8.6	8.7
	Disagree	28	8.9	8.9	17.6
	Undecided	61	19.5	19.5	36.9
	Agree	103	32.9	32.9	69.9
	Strongly Agree	94	30.0	30.0	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.47 shows the responses to the question 'I felt more at home in TRNC because I had access to information through social media that helped me adjust quickly to the new environment'. Based on the results, 27 respondents (8.6%) held a stance of strong disagreement, 28 respondents (8.9%) expressed disagreement, 61 respondents (19.5%) exhibited uncertainty, 103 respondents (32.9%) showed agreement, while a notable number of 94 respondents (30.0%) strongly concurred with the statement. Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that students felt more at home in TRNC because they had access to information through social media that helped them adjust quickly to the new environment.

Table 4.48: Social media was used to disseminate accurate information to the public during the pandemic.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	9	2.9	2.9	2.9
	Disagree	24	7.7	7.7	10.6
	Undecided	79	25.2	25.2	35.6
	Agree	97	31.0	31.0	66.7
	Strongly Agree	104	33.2	33.2	100.0
	Total	312	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.48 shows the responses to the question 'Social media was used to disseminate accurate information to the public during the pandemic'. Based on the results, it was observed that 9 respondents (2.9%) held a stance of strong disagreement, 24 respondents (7.7%) expressed disagreement, 79 respondents (25.2%) exhibited uncertainty, 97 respondents (31.0%) showed agreement, while a significant number of 104 respondents (33.2%) strongly concurred with the statement.

Therefore, the results have been able to confirm that social media was indeed used to disseminate accurate information to the public during the pandemic.

4.5 Statistical Analysis of the Likert Scale Questions

Table 4.49 displays the mean and standard deviation (S.D) of the responses by the participants. Balcı's scale categorization is employed with the following measurement: 1 corresponds to "Strongly Disagree" (ranging from 1 to 1.79 as "SD"), 2 corresponds to "Disagree" (ranging from 1.80 to 2.59 as "D"), 3 corresponds to "Undecided" (ranging from 2.60 to 3.39 as "U"), 4 corresponds to "Agree" (ranging from 3.40 to 4.19 as "A"), and 5 corresponds to "Strongly Agree" (ranging from 4.20 to 5 as "SA") (Balcı, 2004).

Table 4.49 Statistical analysis of the Likert Scale

Items	Mean	SD	Likert scale division attitudes
23. Social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc.) are very popular among international students.	4.72	.755	SA
24. Students use social media platforms to connect with other students.	4.40	.908	SA
25. International Students use social media platforms to connect with their families and friends abroad during the COVID-19 pandemic.	4.64	.717	SA
26. Students use social media platforms to connect with their tutors.	3.92	1.065	A
27. The use of social media makes the process of learning easy, flexible and fun.	4.09	.959	A
28. The need of social media in teaching and learning is important and undeniable in universities.	4.10	.935	A
29. The lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic affected face to face communication.	3.84	1.079	A
30. The lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic affected the comprehension and focus of international students.	4.41	.891	SA
31. The lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic affected the emotional balance of international students.	4.27	.912	SA
32. The COVID-19 pandemic was characterised by feelings of depression and despondency.	4.04	1.029	A

33. International students had issues adjusting to their new environment because of the restriction in movement during the COVID-19 pandemic.	4.34	.817	SA
34. International students in TRNC consider language barrier as a challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic.	4.28	.898	SA
35. Social media was the primary source of communication during the COVID-19 pandemic.	4.54	.776	SA
36. I used social media to stay updated with current affairs around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic.	4.48	.844	SA
37. I used social media for entertainment during the COVID-19 pandemic.	4.42	.798	SA
38. I used social media as a source of information during the COVID-19 pandemic.	4.45	.745	SA
39. I used social media to keep in touch with my family and friends in my home country during the COVID-19 pandemic.	4.58	.781	SA
40. I used social media platforms and search engines (e.g., google translate) to communicate with people who don't speak English during the COVID-19 pandemic.	4.37	.969	SA
41. Social media was effective in ensuring the continuance of social interactions despite the lockdown.	4.41	.862	SA

42. The use of social media was instrumental in solving the language barrier issue during the COVID-19 pandemic.	4.17	.957	SA
43. Social media helped in projecting relevant safety guidelines which aided in dispelling fear during the COVID-19 pandemic.	4.20	.964	SA
44. Communication over social media was effective in overcoming depression and despondency during the COVID-19 pandemic.	4.10	.971	A
45. Communication over social media was effective in overcoming feelings of isolation and creating a sense of belonging.	4.16	.962	A
46. Social media played a strong role in igniting and nurturing new social contacts in TRNC during the COVID-19 pandemic.	4.07	1.006	A
47. I felt more at home in TRNC because I had access to information through social media that helped me adjust quickly to the new environment.	3.67	1.236	A
48. Social media was used to disseminate accurate information to the public during the pandemic.	3.84	1.063	A

4.6 Interviewing Process

International students studying in EMU, CIU, EUL and CSU were put through careful cross-examination. A total of 10 participants took part in this interview process, with 9 individuals originating from Sub-Saharan Africa, 1 from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Among these participants, 4 were students of Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU), 4 were students of Cyprus International University (CIU), 1 was a student of European University of Lefke (EUL), and the final 1 was a student of Cyprus Science University (CSU).

It is important to note that the lack of balance in participant representation from each university was not intentional but rather a result of the recruitment process based solely on their expressed interest in participation. Initially, the researcher aimed to have 3 participants from each university; however, due to low response rates from EUL and CSU, the decision was made to increase the number of participants from EMU and CIU to 4 each.

Efforts were made to reach out to individuals from diverse regions for participation, but a significant number declined the invitation to take part in the interview process. 8 of these participants (from EMU and CIU) were brought together into a focus group as they resided in the same city - Famagusta. Participants from CSU and EUL had to be interviewed separately owing to the fact that they were resident in separate cities from the location where the focus group interview was conducted and they could not make it. In order to gain an in-depth insight of their experiences communicating, integrating and adapting to their new environment, ten interview questions derived from the research focus were used in the interviews.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted for all participants and the conversations were audio taped and transcribed. Questions were asked one by one for ease of transcription. The participants consisted of 7 males and 3 females. It is worthy of note that the invitation for participation was not limited to any gender or geographical location, it was open to all international university students and only those who accepted to join in were recruited for the process. Some students agreed to join in but they were unavailable when the focus group interview was conducted.

4.7 Findings from the Interview

Question 1: Do you use social media? (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, etc.) How often? How much time? Which platform do you use the most?

All 10 participants who took part in the focus group interview attested to their frequent use of social media. Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, and WhatsApp were the platforms that were consistently named by all the participants. This broad acknowledgement highlights the commonality of these platforms in people's modern digital lives.

Notable variances were seen when individuals were asked how long they spent each day on social media. Four of the ten participants said they spent about five hours a day engaging in social media activities.

The time commitment of 2 other participants was between two and three hours each day, which is slightly less. One participant reported spending between six and eight hours each day on social media, indicating a greater degree of commitment. Another

one estimated a daily engagement of seven to eight hours - a very intensive participation.

The last participant revealed the level of participation that was the most significant, stating that she spent more than 10 hours every day on social media. These results highlight how diverse and extensive the participants' use of social media was. The popularity of these platforms and the range of time commitments they need highlight the importance of social media in today's society and the need for more research into how it affects people's everyday lives and relationships.

Question 2: What purpose do social media have in your life? How involved are you with social media sites?

All 10 participants showed a high degree of social media engagement, highlighting the many ways it played a part in their daily lives. The majority of participants agreed that communication enhancement was the main goal. For both personal and professional reasons, many saw social media as an essential tool for establishing connections. This communication component included networking, talking to friends and family, keeping up with current events, and communicating for work.

Social media's main contribution to participants' lives was its facilitation of communication. It provided a practical way to keep in in touch with friends and family, learn about world news, communicate with others in the professional world, and find chances for socializing and meeting new people.

While communication is the main focus, several people also mentioned other social media services. These included ways to spend the time and increase engagement via social media, possibilities for amusement, and ways to make money. These numerous features highlight how adaptable social media is in addressing different personal requirements and preferences. In conclusion, participants identified social media's crucial function in communication as a recurrent theme.

Other respondents emphasized social media's potential for amusement, financial gain, and relaxation. These varied features highlight how social media has a huge impact on today's society.

Question 3: Did you come to North Cyprus during the COVID-19 pandemic? If yes, how did social media help you to develop intercultural adaptation in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a diverse range of responses was collected regarding individuals' experiences of coming to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and how social media facilitated intercultural adaptation. 9 respondents from Sub-Saharan Africa acknowledged that they arrived in the TRNC during the pandemic, notably during lockdown periods. They emphasized the pivotal role of social media and search engines in overcoming language barriers and facilitating communication with Turkish and French Non-English-speaking individuals. Other recorded replies include: Utilization of instant interpretation functions on social media platforms and search engines to communicate effectively with Turkish locals due to limited knowledge of the language, participation in a dedicated WhatsApp group chat for newcomers and aficionados, which played a

crucial role in maintaining consistent interaction, enhancing communication with both locals and fellow enthusiasts who had diverse language backgrounds.

A respondent who was previously resident in Turkey but originally hailed from Syria (The MENA region) highlighted that he had minimal adaptation challenges.

Question 4: What adjustment challenges (i.e., cultural shock) did you face when you came to TRNC?

According to findings, 9 international university students (3 from EMU, 4 from CIU, 1 from EUL and 1 from CSU) pointed out language barrier as a significant cultural shock upon entry into the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. 8 of them expressed their concerns about how it significantly impacted on their communication and integration when they came in. 1 of the participants from EMU who hails from Sub-Saharan Africa, stated that his experience during the pandemic was a little easier than others because he had proactively started studying Turkish language before arriving.

This discovery emphasizes the importance of social media in breaking down language barriers, as he was able to adapt more quickly than others from the same location. He was able to access language study materials, participate in language exchange events, and establish contacts with Turkish speakers using utilizing social media sites. This highlights the potential of social media as a significant tool for assisting international learners in developing language skills and managing cultural differences during their academic journey.

The last participant from Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region, was already resident in Turkey and due to the use of Turkish language, he had no issues communicating when he moved to TRNC. Other significant cultural shocks that the participants stated include: Variance in food and style of dressing, smoking as a societal norm and dogs roaming freely around the school environment and outside.

According to the quantitative study, 95 out of the total respondents, accounting for 30.6% agreed that language barrier constituted a substantial obstacle during the pandemic, while 162 respondents (51.8%) strongly agreed. The total number of respondents that indicated agreement was 257, accounting for 82.2% of all participants. The average score on the Balcı's scale division was determined to be 4.28, showing a broad preference for "Strongly Agree" responses. This quantitative data is consistent with the conclusions of the qualitative research, in which 8 out of 10 participants cited language barriers as a hindrance.

Question 5: Do you believe your social media use during the pandemic helped you to overcome language barriers, thus enhancing communication with non-English speaking locals?

The utilization of social media and language translation services during the pandemic emerged as a valuable tool for enhancing communication with non-English speaking locals, as expressed by the majority of participants. Nine participants, specifically from Sub-Saharan Africa, shared a unanimous perspective, affirming that their social media use during the pandemic facilitated improved interaction with individuals who did not speak English. These individuals acknowledged that the integration of

language translation services through social media platforms notably eased language barriers, fostering more effective cross-cultural communication.

In contrast, the response from the only participant from the MENA region offered a slightly divergent viewpoint. While acknowledging the potential benefits of social media and translation services for others, this participant personally found the linguistic and cultural similarities within their region to be a less demanding factor. Consequently, they held the belief that social media primarily aided individuals facing greater language disparities.

It is noteworthy that the majority of participants, particularly those from Sub-Saharan Africa, emphasized the role of social media and translation services as instrumental in bridging language gaps, thus contributing to enhanced communication with non-English speakers.

Conversely, the participant from the MENA region recognized the utility of these tools but underscored their greater relevance in contexts marked by more pronounced linguistic diversity.

Question 6: Do you feel your social media use during the pandemic helped in sustaining face to face communication?

All ten participants in the study unanimously concurred that social media has ushered in a novel paradigm of face-to-face communication. They collectively asserted its efficacy in maintaining social connections, forging new friendships and acquaintances, staying in contact with loved ones, and facilitating educational

pursuits. Additionally, participants recognized the pivotal role of social media in the context of blended and hybrid learning models. This consensus underscores the profound impact of social media on interpersonal communication, emphasizing its versatility in diverse aspects of personal and academic life.

Question 7: Are you of the opinion that social media played a strong role in igniting and nurturing new social contacts in TRNC during the pandemic?

All ten participants unanimously concurred with this observation. Notably, the impact of this phenomenon appeared to be more pronounced for eight participants hailing from the Sub-Saharan African region. These individuals faced a unique challenge, as they arrived in a foreign culture entirely unfamiliar to them. Consequently, they needed to embark on a journey of learning and adaptation from the very beginning in order to assimilate into the local community and engage effectively with both residents and enthusiasts. It is noteworthy that one participant originating from Sub-Saharan Africa proactively undertook measures to familiarize themselves with the local culture in advance.

This proactive approach afforded them a smoother transition and facilitated their ability to initiate and cultivate new social connections within the community. In contrast, the participant from the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region may not have encountered significant challenges in terms of adaptation or communication. However, it is crucial to emphasize that social media played a pivotal role in their capacity to initiate and nurture new social contacts, underscoring its relevance as a powerful tool for building and maintaining connections in a cross-cultural context.

Question 8: Do you think your social media use during the pandemic helped you in overcoming isolation and adapting to your new environment?

All ten participants in the study unanimously concur on a pivotal observation: social media platforms have played a crucial role in fostering connectivity and facilitating the establishment of new social interactions. The collective consensus among all ten participants involved in the research project underscores a fundamental assertion, namely, that social media platforms have exhibited a profound impact in the realm of maintaining interpersonal connections and cultivating novel social interactions.

The unanimous agreement among these individuals underscores the significance of this phenomenon, highlighting the pivotal role that social media has come to play in the sphere of contemporary human communication. The utilization of social media platforms has proven to be instrumental in overcoming geographical barriers, allowing individuals to bridge the physical distances that may separate them. It has served as a dynamic and versatile means of preserving pre-existing relationships, as well as fostering the formation of new connections with individuals who may have otherwise remained beyond the reach of traditional communication methods.

This observation aligns with a broader societal trend, wherein digital technology, and social media, in particular, has become integral components of the modern human experience. In essence, the unanimous consensus among the research participants reinforces the notion that social media's impact transcends mere communication; it serves as a catalyst for social interconnectedness in an era marked by the ubiquity of digital technology.

Question 9: What are the advantages of using social media platforms for intercultural adaptation in TRNC during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Two participants in the study made noteworthy observations regarding the impact of social media on cross-cultural communication. Firstly, they highlighted the platform's role in challenging and dispelling cultural stereotypes by providing unrestricted access to unfiltered content representing various cultures.

This exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences aids in fostering a more nuanced and accurate understanding of different societies, thereby contributing to a reduction in prejudicial assumptions. Moreover, these participants emphasized the pivotal role of social media in facilitating cross-cultural communication. They pointed out that the platform acted as a catalyst for establishing new connections and friendships across geographical boundaries.

In addition to bridging the gap between individuals from disparate cultures, social media emerged as a powerful tool for alleviating feelings of boredom and depression, especially during challenging times. The accessibility of diverse content, entertainment options, and interactive features served as a source of solace and distraction.

Furthermore, the participants acknowledged the instrumental role of social media in breaking down language barriers. They highlighted how digital communication platforms enable individuals from different linguistic backgrounds to engage in meaningful exchanges through translation tools and multilingual content. Additionally, the ease and speed of information dissemination were emphasized,

underlining how social media not only enhances cross-cultural understanding but also facilitates the swift transfer of valuable information, which is particularly crucial in the context of a globalized world.

Question 10: What are the disadvantages of using social media platforms for intercultural adaptation in TRNC during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Participants from Sub-Saharan Africa voiced a common sentiment regarding the nature of their social connections in the digital age. One participant articulated that the relationships established through social media tended to be superficial in nature, lacking the depth and significance typically associated with face-to-face interactions. This perceived superficiality was compounded by the reliance on translation services to bridge language barriers, suggesting that the essence of communication might get lost in translation.

Another participant from Sub-Saharan Africa highlighted a preference for physical meetings as a means to truly understand people. They emphasized that in-person interactions provided a richer context for comprehending individuals, implying that online contact often lacked this depth. Furthermore, they pointed out the potential downsides of social media, such as its time-consuming nature and the potential for counterproductive activities, which could detract from meaningful engagement.

Another perspective offered by a participant from the same region was a concern that social media often served as a façade for individuals. They posited that genuine character and intentions might remain concealed behind the curated personas people

presented online. This raised questions about the authenticity of online interactions compared to those in the physical world.

Two participants underscored the challenges of digital communication. They noted that typing and maintaining numerous online interactions could be stressful, highlighting the cognitive and emotional demands of such engagements. Additionally, they shared experiences of cyber bullying, discrimination, and racism, shedding light on the darker side of online interactions, which can have serious implications for mental health and well-being.

Lastly, a participant from the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region drew attention to the toxicity of online content, particularly during the pandemic and lockdown periods. They lamented the proliferation of fake news and conspiracy theories from unverified sources, which not only eroded the credibility of online information but also contributed to social tensions and misinformation.

These narratives collectively illustrate the multifaceted challenges and nuances of social media and digital communication, ranging from concerns about authenticity and depth of connections to the mental and emotional toll of online interactions. The experiences and observations of participants from both Sub-Saharan Africa and the MENA region provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics of virtual social interactions in an increasingly interconnected world.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

This chapter includes a concise analysis of the study, the study's findings, an examination of the research questions to determine the extent to which the survey has addressed them, an overall assessment of the research, and recommendations for future study.

5.1 Summary of the Study

Conducted as a case study during the COVID-19 pandemic, this research aimed to investigate the role of social media during crisis situations. The study sought to gain insights into how social media assisted international university students in TRNC in addressing challenges related to communication, integration, and intercultural adaptation during the pandemic and its immediate aftermath.

Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU), Cyprus International University (CIU), European University of Lefke (EUL) and Cyprus Science University (CSU) were the universities taken into account for the purpose of this study. Taking advantage of the uses and gratifications theory, along with the media dependency theory, the study's main objective is to evaluate how social media was used during the COVID-19 pandemic to deal with the unique peculiarities introduced by the sudden halt in activities. Social media became the platform that sustained communication and intercultural adaptation despite the obvious limitation arising from the ban in movement.

A survey and a focus group interview were utilized in this study. The quantitative research in this study employed a purposive and snowball sampling approach. Four universities—Cyprus International University, Eastern Mediterranean University, European University of Lefke, and Cyprus Science University—provided a total of 313 respondents for the quantitative study. 10 international university students from these four institutions CIU, EMU, EUL and CSU who are studying in North Cyprus were brought together for the focus group interview.

Based on the questionnaire's findings, it is clear that social media had a notable and impactful position in influencing communication, integration, and intercultural adaptation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data acquired demonstrates the considerable influence of social media in boosting connectedness, increasing cross-cultural understanding, and assisting progressive integration.

The findings from the focus group interview also provides compelling evidence of the critical role that social media platforms have played in maintaining communication networks, encouraging integration among diverse communities, and assisting individuals in navigating the complexities of the pandemic era with greater resilience and adaptability.

5.2 Conclusions drawn from the Research

This study was done to better comprehend how social media helped international university students studying in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus to tackle issues of communication, integration and intercultural adaptation during the COVID-19 pandemic and the periods immediately after. After gathering survey information from 313 International university students studying in the Turkish Republic of

Northern Cyprus and conducting a focus group interview on 10 students, several conclusions were arrived upon to address the research questions.

Question 1: What adjustment challenges (i.e., cultural shock) did international students face when they came to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)

When international students arrived in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), they encountered various adjustment challenges, commonly referred to as cultural shock. The primary obstacle they faced was the language barrier, as the official language in TRNC is Turkish, which may have been unfamiliar to many students. Communication difficulties might have caused initial discomfort and hindered their ability to fully engage with the local community and academic environment.

Additionally, students grappled with differences in the style of dressing and cultural norms, which often diverged from those in their home countries. These disparities might have led to feelings of disorientation and confusion as they navigated a new cultural landscape. However, by actively engaging with the local culture, seeking language support, and embracing cultural diversity, international students gradually adapted and integrated into their new environment, ultimately enriching their academic and personal experiences in TRNC.

Question 2: In what ways did the COVID-19 pandemic affect communication of international students in TRNC?

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the communication of international students in TRNC, primarily by disrupting the customary forms of communication that relied on physical contact. With social distancing measures and lockdown restrictions in place, traditional face-to-face interactions, such as in-person meetings, group gatherings, and classroom discussions, were severely limited. This limitation posed challenges for students who were accustomed to direct communication and interpersonal connections. Furthermore, travel restrictions and the suspension of international flights may have hindered the ability of some students to return to their home countries, creating feelings of isolation and distance from family and friends.

Question 3: In what ways did the COVID-19 pandemic affect integration and intercultural adaptation of international students in TRNC?

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the integration and intercultural adaptation of international students in TRNC, exacerbating challenges related to cultural shocks, racism, and stereotypes. With travel restrictions and lockdown measures in place, many students faced delays in their arrival and had to adjust to a new environment without the usual opportunities for in-person socialization and cultural immersion. This disruption to their expected routines and cultural norms led to feelings of disorientation and uncertainty.

Moreover, the pandemic's heightened fear and uncertainty fuelled instances of racism and discrimination towards international students, particularly those of different ethnic backgrounds. Stereotypes about certain nationalities or cultures were perpetuated during the crisis, further complicating the integration process. In such a

context, building intercultural connections and fostering understanding became more challenging.

Question 4: In what ways did the use of social media contribute in helping international students deal with communication challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic?

In response to the challenges posed by the breach in communication, international university students turned to alternative means of communication, such as social media, video conferencing, and instant messaging apps, to stay connected with their peers, families, and support networks. These digital platforms played a crucial role in maintaining communication and mitigating the adverse effects of physical distance during the pandemic.

Question 5: In what ways did the use of social media contribute in helping international students deal with integration and intercultural adaptation challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic?

International university students proactively utilized digital platforms and social media to create virtual communities and exchange experiences, finding alternative ways to adapt and connect with their peers and the local community.

Despite the obstacles posed by the pandemic, resilience and determination among international students played a vital role in navigating these difficulties and finding ways to integrate and adapt in their new cultural context.

Question 5: Is social media an effective tool in ensuring the continuance of communication in tertiary institutions during crisis situations like the COVID-19 pandemic?

Social media has proven to be an effective tool in ensuring the continuance of communication in tertiary institutions during crisis situations like the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pandemic prompted extensive campus closures and a shift to remote learning, social media platforms became critical for linking students, instructors, and staff in real time. Institutions used social media to broadcast important updates, safety regulations, and academic content, keeping the university community informed and involved.

Online platforms enabled teachers and students to communicate in real time, allowing for virtual classrooms, homework submissions, and interactive conversations. Furthermore, social media provided a forum for peer support, establishing a feeling of community among students who may have felt alienated due to the pandemic's restrictive measures. Tertiary institutions successfully maintained vital links and supported the continuity of academic activities by utilising social media as a communication tool, highlighting its crucial function in upholding a sense of unity and facilitating learning in challenging times.

Question 6: Is social media an effective tool in facilitating integration and intercultural adaptation in tertiary institutions during crisis situations like the COVID-19 pandemic?

During times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, social media has shown to be a useful instrument for promoting integration and intercultural adaptation in tertiary institutions. Social media platforms gave students from different cultural backgrounds a virtual space to communicate, exchange experiences, and promote cross-cultural understanding when face-to-face interactions were increasingly limited. International and local students interacted meaningfully, shared opinions, and worked together on academic and community projects through online forums, dismantling obstacles and fostering cross-cultural understanding.

In addition, social media provided a venue for virtual gatherings, cultural exhibits, and language exchange programmes, allowing students to celebrate their cultural variety and learn about other cultures despite geographical limitations. Tertiary institutions used social media to establish hospitable and welcoming environments, supporting students in their integration journey and assisting them in adapting to the challenges handed out by the pandemic with resilience and mutual support. According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, people deliberately select and utilise media, including social media, to meet certain needs and goals.

In times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, social media can serve as a significant resource for international students, providing them with a platform to explore and adapt into new environments. Students may use social media to learn about foreign cultures, take virtual tours, and join online forums to connect with residents or expatriates, meeting their desire for cultural learning and social engagement.

Additionally, media dependency theory emphasises the function of the media as an essential information source during times of crisis when physical interactions are minimal. In this scenario, social media becomes critical for fostering intercultural adaption by giving updates in real time, personal accounts, and opportunities for direct participation. Individuals that use social media lessen uncertainty, get useful insights, and create relationships with their new surroundings, resulting in a smoother integration process despite difficult conditions.

Finally, the confluence of the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Media Dependency Theory demonstrates how social media may be a useful and necessary instrument in assisting integration and intercultural adaptation during crisis situations like the COVID-19 pandemic. The statistical data from the quantitative analysis indicates the crucial role of social media in international students' communication, integration, and adaption processes during the COVID-19 pandemic. 97 respondents (31.0%) agreed, while 104 respondents (33.2%) strongly agreed that social media was an effective instrument for communicating correct information to the public.

Additionally, 103 respondents (32.9%) agreed, while 94 respondents (30.0%) strongly agreed that social media had an important role in helping students feel more at home in TRNC, facilitating their swift adjustment. 113 respondents (36.1%) agreed, while 126 respondents (40.3%) strongly agreed that social media had a substantial influence on kindling and fostering new social ties in TRNC throughout the pandemic.

Furthermore, 80 respondents (25.6%) agreed, while 207 respondents (66.1%) strongly agreed that social media was the primary means of communication during

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the pandemic, allowing international students to stay in touch with family and friends back home. Moreover, a substantial majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media platforms, along with search engines like Google Translate, were effectively utilized to communicate with people who do not speak English (26.2% agreed, 59.7% strongly agreed). 82 respondents (26.2%) agreed, while 59.7% strongly agreed that social media platforms, as well as search engines like Google Translate, were efficiently used to interact with persons who did not understand English.

Finally, the statistical data unambiguously show that social media had a critical role in improving communication, integration, and adaption experiences for foreign students in TRNC during the COVID-19 epidemic. The widespread use of social media as a versatile and accessible communication medium enables students to stay informed, create social contacts, and keep links with their home countries, allowing them to acclimatise to their new academic and cultural environment more smoothly.

This study confirmed the notion that a vast majority of international university students studying in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus utilized social media platforms in ensuring communication with friends, classmates, tutors, and family members in their respective home countries. Despite the stringent mobility limitations enforced during the COVID-19 lockdown periods, international students in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) were able to integrate and adapt adequately to the new cultural setting.

This seamless integration was made possible by the quantity of materials accessible online about the TRNC, which allowed students to virtually explore and become

acquainted with the local culture and way of life. The plethora of online materials acted as a helpful resource for students, minimising the strain caused by the restriction in physical interactions and assisting their adjustment to the new environment during the pandemic.

From the findings, it is clear that social media was the window of access within these periods as it was only through these platforms that international university students had access to information and social connections which in turn enhanced their communication and integration.

5.3 Recommendations for Further Study

Future research can rely on this study to investigate the long-term impacts of social media use on the integration and adaption of international university students in TRNC beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Examining the experiences of students from other countries who depend largely on the internet to communicate and socialize might give useful insights on the benefits and drawbacks of utilising these platforms in building a sense of community and adjusting to other cultural contexts.

Furthermore, investigating the precise social media platforms and their unique characteristic features that have the most impact on international students might help educational institutions in the establishment of customized initiatives and support systems.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Dear Respondent,

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, conducting a field research to gather data on the topic: The role of social media on communication, integration and adaptation of international students in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The objective of this research is to fulfil the requirements for the award of a Master of Arts degree.

I kindly crave your indulgence in completing the following survey questions. You can be assured that your opinions will only be utilized for the purpose of this research and that they will be kept private. You can stop filling this survey anytime you want if you are not comfortable with the questions asked. Carefully select the option(s) that best applies to you. Please note that this survey is strictly for those who were in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you so much for your support and assistance.

Victor Ayodele Gabriel

21506622

Survey Questions

(Please tick or circle your answer)

1. What geographical region are you from?

a) Sub-Saharan Africa   b) Iran   c) Turkey   d) Middle East   e) Asia   f) The Caucasus   g) Other: please specify………………………..

2. What is your age?

a) 16 to 20   b) 21 to 25   c) 26 to 30   d) above 31

3. What is your gender?

a) Male   b) Female   c) Other

4. What university do you attend?

a) Cyprus International University (CIU)   b) Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU)   c) European University of Lefke (EUL)   d) Cyprus Science University (CSU)

5. What is your educational level?

a) Undergraduate Student   b) Master Student   c) PhD Student

6. What is your academic year of study in the university?

a) First year   b) Second year   c) Third Year   b) Fourth year

7. What is your marital status?

a) Single   b) Married   c) Other: please specify………………….

(Please tick as you deem appropriate)

8. Do you have user account(s) on any social media platforms?

a) Yes   b) No

9. How many user accounts do you have?

a) 1   b) 2   c) 3   d) 4   e) 5 and above

10. Which of the following accounts is your favourite or you use the most?

a) Facebook   b) Twitter   c) YouTube   d) WhatsApp   e) Instagram   f) TikTok   g) Other, please specify…………………………

11. What technological device do you use the most?

a) mobile phone   b) laptop   c) iPad   d) android tablets   e) Other, please specify……………………………..

12. How many hours do you spend on social media daily?

a) Less than one hour   b) 1-2 hours   c) 3-4 hours   d) 5-6 hours   e) 7 hours and over

13. Why do you use social media?

Multiple options allowed

a) to stay updated with current affairs   b) to look for information   c) for entertainment and leisure   d) to share information   e) to make new contacts   f) to socialize with friends   g) Other, please specify………………………………….

14. Have you been exposed to the use of social media platforms for educational purposes before the COVID-19 pandemic?

a) Yes   b) No

15. If your answer in question (14) is yes, was learning with the aid of these social media platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic same as the time before?

a) Yes   b) No

16. If your answer in question (14) is no, was adjusting to taking classes and tests on social media platforms easy for you?

a) Yes   b) No

17. Which learning model would you prefer for educational purposes?

a) Online learning model   b) Traditional classroom model   c) Hybrid model (i.e., a combination of [a] and [b])   d) Blended model

18. What other areas of your life did the lockdown protocol affect?

*You may choose more than one option

a) Emotional balance   b) Mental health   c) Disruption of daily routines   d) Social ties   e) Comprehension and focus   f) Other, please specify……………………

19. Did the area(s) listed in question (18) have any direct impact on your communication?

a) Yes   b) No

20. Did the area(s) listed in question (18) have any direct impact on your intercultural adaptation process?

a) Yes   b) No

21. Did the use of Social media assist in reorganizing your disrupted daily routine during the COVID-19 pandemic?

a) Yes b) No

22. Did you at any point during the COVID-19 pandemic feel like you were becoming too dependent on social media in achieving your daily goals?

a) Yes b) No

(Please tick the applicable responses SA-5-strongly agree; A-4- Agree; U-3-undecided; D-2-Disagree; SD-1-strongly disagree.

S/No	Likert Scale	SA	A	U	D	SD
		5	4	3	2	1
Assessing the use of Social Media in Universities						
23	Social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc.) are very popular among international students.					
24	Students use social media platforms to connect with other students.					
25	International Students use social media platforms to connect with their families and friends abroad.					
26	Students use social media platforms to connect with their tutors.					
27	The use of social media makes the process of learning easy, flexible and fun.					
28	The need of social media in teaching					

	and learning is important and undeniable in universities.					

Assessing the effect of the Pandemic on the daily lives of International students in TRNC

29	The lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic affected face to face communication.					
30	The lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic affected the comprehension and focus of international students.					
31	The lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic affected the emotional balance of international students.					
32	The COVID-19 pandemic was characterised by feelings of depression and despondency.					
33	International students had issues adjusting to their new environment because of the restriction in movement during the COVID-19 pandemic.					
34	International students in TRNC consider language barrier as a challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic.					

Assessing the usage of social media during the Pandemic

35	Social media was the primary source of communication during the COVID-19					

	pandemic.					
36	I used social media to stay updated with current affairs around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic.					
37	I used social media for entertainment during the COVID-19 pandemic.					
38	I used social media as a source of information during the COVID-19 pandemic.					
39	I used social media to keep in touch with my family and friends in my home country during the COVID-19 pandemic.					
40	I used social media platforms and search engines (e.g., google translate) to communicate with people who don't speak English during the COVID-19 pandemic.					
Assessing the impact of the use of social media on Communication during the Pandemic						
41	Social media was effective in ensuring the continuance of social interactions despite the lockdown.					
42	The use of social media was instrumental in solving the language barrier issue during the COVID-19 pandemic.					
43	Social media helped in projecting relevant safety guidelines which aided in dispelling					

	fear during the COVID-19 pandemic.				
44	Communication over social media was effective in overcoming depression and despondency during the COVID-19 pandemic.				
Assessing the impact of the use of social media on Integration and Intercultural adaptation of university students during the COVID-19 pandemic.					
45	Communication over social media was effective in overcoming feelings of isolation and creating a sense of belonging.				
46	Social media played a strong role in igniting and nurturing new social contacts in TRNC during the COVID-19 pandemic.				
47	I felt more at home in TRNC because I had access to information through social media that helped me adjust quickly to the new environment.				
48	Social media was used to disseminate accurate information to the public during the pandemic.				

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Eastern Mediterranean University

CONSENT FORM

Topic: The role of social media on communication, integration and adaptation of international students in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

- I voluntarily consent to taking part in this research study.
- I have been fully informed about the objectives of this research, and what the focus group interview entails
- The researcher has addressed all of my concerns and clarified that there are no potential risks associated with my participation in this study.
- I am aware that I do not have to respond to all of the questions I am asked and that I can withdraw at any time without consequences.
- I am aware that any information I supply will be kept private and used only for the Purpose of this research.
- I consent to the publication of any research findings from this study, as long as my identity is kept confidential.

Name of Participant	
Signature of Participant	
Date	

- I certify that I have addressed all concerns and given the aforementioned participant all information about this research, including what participation entails

Signature of Researcher		Date	

Interview Questions

This research will involve the use of interviews in getting the perspectives of the participants. Focus group will be used to find answers to the questions below through a focus group interview.

1. Do you use social media? (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, etc.) How often? How much time? Which platform do you use the most?

2. What purpose do social media have in your life? How involved are you with social media sites?

3. Did you come to North Cyprus during the COVID-19 pandemic? If yes, how did social media help you to develop intercultural adaptation in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)?

4. What adjustment challenges (i.e., cultural shock) did you face when you came to TRNC?

5. Do you believe your social media use during the pandemic helped you to overcome language barriers, thus enhancing communication with non-English speaking locals?

6. Do you feel your social media use during the pandemic helped in sustaining face to face communication?

7. Are you of the opinion that social media played a strong role in igniting and nurturing new social contacts in TRNC during the pandemic?

8. Do you think your social media use during the pandemic helped you in overcoming isolation and adapting to your new environment?

9. What are the advantages of using social media platforms for intercultural adaptation in TRNC during the COVID-19 pandemic?

10. What are the disadvantages of using social media platforms for intercultural adaptation in TRNC during the COVID-19 pandemic?