The Potential of Social Media to Enhance Cultural Adaptation: A Study on Iranian Student in the Finnish Context

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Abstract: This paper aims to find out the adequacy of social media as a trendy technology application to enhance cultural adaptation among Iranian tertiary-level students in Finland. For this purpose, integrative communication theory adapted as the research framework to study the effect of environment and investigate the approach of social and individuals' communication in the process of cultural adaptation. Accordingly, 23 students of the different universities in Finland through a snowball sampling method were interviewed and their opinion, attitudes, feeling and experienced were recorded and thematically analyzed. The results of the study indicated the potential of social media for individual communication among the participants. Iranian students are easily communicating with their family and friends inside and outside of Finland. It assists to reduce the intercultural stress of the participants. Further, social media opens the door for students (or immigrants) to communicate with their compatriots in Finland when they need some information or guidance. However, some participants of this study do not believe the adequacy of the current function of social media for enhancing their cultural adaptation. While Friendship with Finnish is a challenge for Iranian students, social media could not provide a route to facilitate communication between Iranians and Finnish society. Whereas social media is potential to facilitate exchanging the information for a minor community in a host country and providing acting as a bridge to communicate immigrant with local people, it is substantial to find the right approach that social media could enhance cultural adaptation through these functions.

Keywords: social media, cultural adaptation, Finnish culture.

1   Introduction

To understand the internationalization of higher education in the society, examining the mobility of international students and their cultural integration process are becoming increasingly important. Between 2000 and 2011; the number of international students has more than doubled in the world. In 2016, more than 4.85 million students are enrolled outside their country of citizenship [1]. The largest numbers of international students are from China, India, and Korea. Asian students account for 53% of all students studying abroad worldwide. OECD (2011)[2] estimated an approximate 3.7 million students to have been studying outside their respective home countries in 2011, and the numbers have increased since (p.320). Many scholars have investigated the mobility of international students and the reasons behind that [3; 4; 5; 6]. One study [7] highlighted eleven factors that influence students' decisions to leave their home countries to study abroad. These factors include mobility costs, employment and income in the host country, geographical distance, host country climate, quality of host institutions, financial aid and future career perspective, with factors such as economic status of the home country, language and intercultural training of home institutions, parental influence and personal interest in mobility having been identified as push factors.

Regardless of the reasons for the mobility, international students are facing many challenges during their time abroad, in both academic settings and in their new societal environments. The researchers [8] in particular, looked at students studying in the U.S., China, and France, and revealed these international students to face a myriad of issues in their new host societies, including family problems, financial difficulties, psychological problems and socio-cultural problems. Cultural adjustment appears to be particularly problematic and has been widely studied as a key problem with

tertiary-level international students in countries such as Japan [9], Spain [9], the U.S. [11; 12;13;14;15;16] and in African countries [17;18]. Of the extensive research conducted, certain studies emphasized inadequate language proficiency to be a major issue when examining transnational spaces [19; 20; 21; 14]. Lack of language proficiency may affect the international students' communication within academic environments, and may cause them to feel disconnected from their peers or classmates. Further, this may affect students' academic activities and increases interpersonal distress.

Accordingly, studies on the process of cultural adaptation is considered significant and because of the importance of communication in the process of cultural adaptation, the scholars attempt to develop the framework to interpret the dynamism of communication in the process of cultural adaptation. Kim (2001) [22] believes that attention to environment and individuals' communication is the missing keys in the literature of cultural adaptation. In this regard, Integrative Communication Theory suggested by Kim offers a "big picture," a systemic insight into what happens over time when someone crosses cultural boundaries and what factors facilitate or impede his or her adaptation to the host culture. In this theory, Cross-cultural adaptation is defined as "*the entirety of the dynamic process by which individuals who, through direct and indirect contact and communication with a new, changing, or changing the environment, strive to establish (or reestablish) and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment*" [22 , p. 31].

With the growth of communication facilities in the last two decades, social media have become part of the environment. Therefore, analyzing individual and social communication through social media application in the process of cultural adaptation has received scholars' attention. Many studies have highlighted the potential of the social network to aid cultural adaptation of immigrants and students [23; 24; 25; 26; 27; 28; 29, 30]. The researchers [31] found how social network usage increased the cultural adaptation among beginner Chinese students in the United States. In the same context, the other research [32] indicated Facebook and Renren reflected Chinese students' cultural orientation, language proficiency, and length of stay in the United State. These results are supporting the another findings [33] that indicated the students who were using Facebook demonstrated a lower degree of acculturative stress and a higher degree of psychological well-being compared to other groups in the study.

2   Context of the Study

This study conducted on the context of the Finnish-Iranian society and Iranian students are the participants of the study. Although many indices of the Iranian population appear similar to those of developed countries, the rate of immigration to Iran is negative [34]. An average of 300,000 people leaves the country annually, placing Iran in the 15th position among 193 countries in terms of net migration rate. In addition, a large number of Iranians move aboard each year for the purpose of their studies. Based on UNESCO data (2012), Iran has the largest number of students studying abroad among the Middle Eastern countries after Saudi Arabia. An estimate by the Iranian Ministry of Education placed between 350 and 500 thousand Iranians to be studying outside of Iran as of 2014 [35].

Finland as the host country is not a priority destination for International students because of the language barrier and geographic condition [36]. However, the quality of Finland educational system is known over the world, which has raised international interest [37]. It has caused the number of international students after 2005 has increased by over 10% per year as in 2015 more than 20 thousands foreign students enrolled in Finland's universities university of applied science (UAS). "*In total, 76% of international students in Finnish universities came from outside of the EU/ EEA countries in 2015. In UAS's, the number is even higher, 80% coming outside of the EU/ EEA, whereas in universities the figure is 73%*" [38].

3   Method

The participants of this study were from the different universities in Finland and the snowball sampling method was employed to find Iranian tertiary-level students in Finland. In phenomenography, the size sample of respondents continually increases to achieve the maximum variation regarding the data saturation [39]. The sample size was 23 master and Ph.D. students. The study utilized a semi-structured interview protocol to uncover the interviewees' values, feelings, beliefs, and experiences of the phenomenon. The interview protocol included questions about demographic information, participants' conceptions and experiences of Finnish society and their conceptions and experiences of studying in Finland and how social media was used and in their daily life to learn a new culture.

The participants were from the different universities in Finland. They were included 23 students including 14 male and 9 female 14 of them were studying in master's degree and 9 remained were studying as PhD degree. The demographic information of the participants is shown in Table 2.

The location of interviews based on the selection of participants. Accordingly, the students who are studying in the Tampere University were interviewed face to face in the university campus and other students were interviewed through video skype. The interviews were conducted in the native language of the interviewees (i.e. Farsi) since the native language of the interviewer (one of the authors of this paper) is Iranian. This allowed for control of any culturally determined construct bias. Furthermore, this reduced the risk that the interviewer and interviewee would consider different factors to be of importance, as they may attribute different meanings and interpretations to the events/behavior described by the interviewee [40].

The interview data collected through audio recordings and the data were transcribed verbatim for analysis of the meanings, especially those between the sets of categories. Thematic analysis was employed as the method for analyzing the data. According to Braun & Clarke (2006) [41], "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). This study utilizes the thematic analysis will be conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2014) guidelines. "Thematic analysis is a poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytic method within psychology" [41, p: 77]. Accordingly, in the first step, the data were transcribed. Subsequently, data coded and categorized

4 Results

Social media has a place in the daily activities of Iranian students indeed. They are communicating with Iranians, international and Finnish people through social media. They use the different applications for the different purposes. The theme of analysed data determined the characteristics of participants' communication in Finnish-Iranian society concerning social media usage. Further, the different social media applications for individual and social purposes in original and host countries are illustrated.

4.1 Communication in Finnish-Iranian Society: Regardless of the used application type for communicating, Iranian students who live in the Finnish-Iranian society face some challenges in either Finnish or Iranian society in Finland. In this section, Iranian students' feeling, ideas, thoughts, and experiences of communication with Finnish and Iranian people in Finland have studied. The participants' stress and adaptation in Finnish society is categorized as effortless, challenging and hard in communication and the role of social media in this process is highlighted.

4.1.1 Communicating with Finnish people : The result of verbatim analysis regarding the nationality of friends indicated that most of the participants of the study feel communication and making friends with Finnish people is not easy. Nine of 23 participants have more Iranian than other nationalities' friend and 8 of remained participants have more international friends than Finnish. In fact, only two of 23 participants have Finnish friends more than other nationalities. The notable results show that the years of living in Finland necessarily has not increased having Finnish friends. For example, "B1" and "B2" are almost at the same age, level of study, position in the university and both are in Finland for about 7 years. However, "B1"

has many Finnish friends while "B2" does not have any Finnish friend and feel very far from Finnish students or colleagues. Findings of the study demonstrated three levels of conceptions about communication in Finnish society as follows:

a) *Communication is possible and effortless:* Some participants are communicating and building a friendship with the Finnish people. They feel communication with Finnish people is easy and does not need much effort. Although the language is the most important tool for communicating but the level of their knowledge of the Finnish language is different. While, "B1" knows the Finnish language well, "L1" and "F1" still are the beginner in the Finnish language.

"B1" is a doctoral researcher. He has citizenship in Finland, knows himself as a member of Finnish society, and describes his experiences in communication in Finnish society well. He claims "*Most of my friends are foreigners. I liked to have more friends but I didn't have so much time. .. Now I am more with Finnish friends. ... When I came to open communication with Finnish, I lost that sense that these people are very different from us.*" Concerning the role of social media to develop his cultural adaptation, he believes that social media did not have much effect in his adaptation and communication in Finland. He believes "*In fact, the culture of virtual communication is less in Finnish people than Iranians.*" He trusts What's app application more than others although he is online on Facebook messenger for his friends to him Facebook is more useful to organize face-to-face meetings.

Similarly, "L1" enjoys contacting with Finnish people and feel learning from them, although after being 6 years in Finland still does not know the Finnish language. She prefers having Finnish friends than Iranian friends. She uses social media for communicating with her family in Iran, however, she dislikes the style of using social media among Iranians: "*I do not like to send some jokes or wasting time. I just share something that has meaning or communicate with others*". She believes social media did not help her to integrate with society as much as her Finnish friends did.

Likewise, "F1" who is playing Iranian music instrument in one Finnish band, appreciates Finnish culture and people and believes:" *They (Finn) are very open mind. I think they have learned that truth is not only what we think and we know. The human can have different thoughts.*" He uses social media to communicate with his family but believes social media cannot do much in the process of cultural adaptation. "F1" used to use social media particularly, Facebook more but he thinks the way of using social media in the first two years after entering Finland had made him more connected to the home country and resisting to be integrated into the new culture.

"A3" is working full-time during her master thesis knows herself as part of Finnish society and feel comfortable with Finnish people. She understands Finnish language but still not feeling so comfortable to talk in Finnish. She believes having good friends helped her more to integrate into the new culture than any software or application. She uses Facebook to ask her question from other students or Iranians but not forgetting knowledge or communicating in the new culture.

These participants found Finnish people close to them and feel comfortable spending their time with them. They do not feel a mental wall between themselves and their Finnish friends and sometimes they find themselves more fit with them than some of their compatriots (L1 and F1). They not only did not find social media for helping them to integrate the new culture but they think it could keep them more introverted and far from learning and experiencing the new culture.

b) *Communication is challenging but valuable:* Some of the Iranian students would like to communicate with Finnish society but building friendship with Finnish people is challenging for them. "Y1", and "D1", are interested in communication with Finnish although do not have any Finnish friend.

"D1" does not know himself as a member of the Finnish society although he feels he is not an Iranian anymore. He believes "*There are many things that I accept in Iranian culture. I appreciate the culture of respect in Iranian society and also the culture and art that Iranian have are very powerful.*" He prefers to communicate and friendship with Finnish but more of his friends are international students. He has a negative thought about social media and feels in the new world the media is controlling people but still, he uses that to know about Finnish culture. For that, he has participated in a Finnish page on Facebook: "*I am in the group that has 20 thousand Finn. I see how*

they are communicating. That helped me. I use google translate. I am one of the few members who are not Finnish. I don't suggest that link to others. Because I am patient but others may leave the page. ... It helps me to integrate. It has cheap content but it is active."

Likewise, "Y1" studies Ph.D. program in the second year and does not have any Finnish friends yet while she has a good image about them and their friendship. More of her experiences about Finnish people and culture are based on what she has heard "*I found it is difficult to get a friend with them. They are friendly but making a connection with them is hard. .. I have a challenge. They are not keeping up with you. You have to ask them a lot. Maybe you should ask them many times. But you are the main one for pushing them. If you ask, they are very helpful… They don't get involved with you. You should start the talk, they don't get involved with you…. I really like to become friend with them. I don't know how to make a connection with them.*"

D1 is getting help from the translation link on Facebook. It shows how participant's Interest toward the new culture is important to get cultural knowledge even if the barrier of language exist. However, he is still learning Finnish culture as an outsider and not integrating because there is not an available route for some students to communicate in Finnish society.

c) *Communication is hard because we are different:* The third group of the participants are not interested to communicate with Finnish people because they do not feel to have anything to share with them. They feel Iranians life and condition is too far from Finnish culture and life style. Therefore, they may not understand each other well even if they can talk or spend time with each other it would be limited in a few cases.

For example, "H2" doctoral students who lives with his family in Finland does not feel any attachment with Finnish society. He is keeping his communication with his family and friends in other countries through Facebook. He is comfortable living in Finland and although has received the citizenship of Finland but is not interested to make a communication or Friendship with Finnish. Similarly, "B2, a doctoral student who lives in Finland for 7 years, still finds himself as a stranger in Finland and believes "It *is not easy to get a close friend with them (Finn people). Their culture is very different from ours…. In fact, now I am not so interested to have Finnish friends because I see them very far from us.*" He does not have any Finnish friend and more communicating with Iranians in Finland. He is watching two Farsi channels of satellite and get information about events in Finland through Facebook or YouTube. Although he is always available on social media for his personal purposes, does not know himself active in social media because does not share content.

The other student, "H1" believes "*there are too many differences between our culture and Finn ('culture)… when they come in the relationship, they do not much effort to keep it and they just leave it*". He knows social media important for finding other Iranians in Finland and getting some important information about Finland and Finnish culture from them. However, most of his friends are international especially Asian students. "H1" feels Finnish students are cold to make a friendship. Similarly, "S1" and "S2" feel there is not much talk with Finnish people because Iranians and Finns are different. "S2" describes, "*I feel we don't have any talk. Talking becomes very casual after sometimes. I like to communicate with people who are in my own language and culture. I like to spend time with Iranians*". He is following Iranian news by social media and likes to watch football from the Iranian TV channel with Iranian friends. Likewise, "F2", he claims that he more was active in social media but later he realized to be active in social media has disconnected him from real communication. He thinks although some Iranians are trying to behave like Finnish people, in the end, they are not accepted in the society like native people.

Some of the participants are disappointed for making the friendship in Finland as they have had in Iran or other countries. "A1", "A3", "E1", "M1" are frustrated to communicate with Finnish. While "S3" has accepted this problem in Finnish environment, "M1" is feeling irritable living in Finland although he has lived in U.K for four years and has a Finnish wife. He believes that the coldness in Finnish people behaviors has affected on other nationalities and made it as a norm in Finland environment. He states: "*Here the commination become fades. You think the norm is this and you go with the wave. Unfortunately, I couldn't make close*

communication with anyone here… maybe change in me or change in environment". He is available in What's app and telegram for contacting his family and getting news from Iran every day. He has Facebook but does not do much activity in that because he does not want to keep time on that. He also receives Iranian news of Iran from Persian channels.

Likewise, "A1" dislike communication rules in Finland. He has very few friends and believes communication in Finnish environment is very limited and the reason is that "*Finnish students don't like to communicate with international students*". He seems to keep a tight communicating with his parents and may contact with them two times a day. He uses What's pp and Facebook for communication with friends and uses Facebook for getting information from events. Social media helped "A1" to accommodate in Finland by getting help from Iranian. However, he claims: "*Social media didn't help me for being adapted in Finnish culture. Most social media are used by international.*"

While "M1", "A1" and "E1" are frustrated about communicating with Finnish people in Finland, "A2" and "S3" are accepting the Finnish culture and feel comfortable living in Finland. "S3" claims that in the first year after coming to Finland, he was living alone and he had social problem but now he does not expect much in his social life in Finland. He has used social media for getting information to come to Finland and even now, he is the member of telegram channel and Facebook pages of Iranians. He uses Persian sites, channels and groups on social media to get the information or help but he believes that assuming social media to make a community for mixing Finnish and Iranian nationality and culture is a wrong expectation. He has an optimistic view of living Iranian and Finnish in the same society although he believes they are very different in background and culture.

Overall, the number of participants who believe Finnish culture and Iranian culture are too far is more than the number of those participants who feel comfortable to communicate with Finnish people. Notwithstanding they agree in the disparity between two cultures, their reflection in the deal with that is different.

4.1.2 Communicating with Iranians people in Finland: Most of the participants are the members of the different Facebook pages that belong to students or Iranian living in Finland. These pages connect Iranians to each other. Facebook pages are meant for asking a question and receiving the answer that may happen once or twice per month. Further, there are two groups in telegram app with 114 and 175 members that their membership may cover students and some other Iranian immigrants in Finland. The content of these groups relates to personal questions about the university, visa, laws, and general rules in Finland. The contents are useful for the group members but usually do not include any cultural and communication issues in Finland. The conversations are usually short and who wants to get more information or discussion, asks permission for a private chat. Therefore, these portals become the individual tool than a social portal when more details are required. A few of students who were interviewed for this study were the members of these telegram groups. But the majority of them are always available for their family and their friends in Iran via two basic applications, What's app and telegram for calling and texting. Iranian TV channels sites (usually available on YouTube), Facebook and telegram channels and groups are the source of news from Iran.

Social life still seems difficult for many of the Iranian students in Finland particularly single students. Many participants are still more attached to Iranian friends although they are not satisfied in their friendship with Iranian. "B2" has a few Iranian friends and sees even the culture of Iranians in Finland is very different. Similarly, "S1" does not see himself matched with the type of Iranians who are living in abroad and feels problem in his social life. "D1" although appreciates Iranian culture and art, prefers to have Finnish friends. "F1" the master student who has left his flight engineering job in Iran and has experienced being a cleaner in Finland does not feel to have any Iranian friend in Finland and thinks Iranians are treating the same way as inside Iran with each other (exploitation and colonialism). "L1" who has a small family in Finland says, "*I have more problem with Iranian friends. For example, I don't want for some gathering but they invite me and then I have to invite them. But for Finn friends, we go to café or we invite for a coffee. The relationship is clear*". Likewise, "F1" and

"S3" are married students who live with their families do not feel problem in their social life but feel challenging to communicate with Iranians in Finland and beliefs. "S3" states: "*I have more challenges with Iranian. Maybe the same guard that we have as Iranian and maybe it is my own problem and I am trying to make it less. In a small city like Oulu, the number of Iranians are less, people know each other as a village, and I think I had more disappointment in my social life. Maybe it is because we have more expectation from our same language people. It is not because of their behaviors.*". "H1", also, likes to be far from Iranians because he sees Iran as a multicultural society itself. He says, "*Inside our own country (Iran) we have more cultural conflicts. Because when I go to one state in the east of Iran they talk in their language that we can't understand and they support themselves but not me because I went there from Tehran.*"

4.3 Membership in Finnish Society

Although Communication is the main door to enter the new culture, the member of local friends may not make the immigrant feel being a member of society. While 17, of 23 participants who were interviewed plan to reside in Finland, few of them feeling to be a member of society because of the different reasons (table 3).

Table 3: Some participants' views about the reasons of membership in Finnish society

Participant	Statement
B1	Yes, I know myself as a member of Finnish society. From 1 to 10 I give myself 8. I think more is because of the friends that I have here.
L1	I still don't know myself as a member in Finnish society. I don't know the Finnish language so I am still outsider.
D1	I give one or 2 from 10 to myself. Because if I am not spending my time with Finn.
A1	I see myself as a member of Finnish society. I give myself 6 from 10. Because it is important, that Finland develops.
S2	I know myself a member of Finnish society. Because I am working. If I give myself 4 from 10. If I knew the Finnish language, I was giving myself 8.
B2	I don't know their language. Someone who is working or has a Finnish girlfriend is integrated.
B3	I give myself 5 from 10. If I learn the Finnish language, it helps me. If you have a job, you are more in the society
S3	I still don't feel a member of Finnish society. I am a member of the minority here and I hope the size of minority reduces by time. but still, I don't see myself as a member of society. I think I am 4 from 10.

While many participants assume the number of Finnish friends as the necessity for their cultural integration, for plenty of them, having a job and talking with the Finnish language means the membership in Finnish society. As "S3" claims "*I think if you find a job and earn money and pay tax it means being integrated into society, it means you attend in the society. It is right way of citizenship when you accept responsibility.. but if you have 50 Finnish friends and be close to them, I don't call it as integrating. It is a little integration*". To "S3", the meaning of integration in the new culture is a broader conception. He thinks having a deserving job and place in Finland is required for integrating or being a part of Finnish society and the number of Finnish friends is not a symbol of integration in the new culture. He states that social media can be useful if it just provides a source of information through a community for the minority in the society (particularly Iranians) to solve their problem and share their experiences in the portal. He plans to reside in Finland although believes Iranians and Finnish are different and do not have many Finnish friends. Similarly, "S2" considers the difference between Iranian and Finnish culture as a barrier for communication and believes social media has accomplished its responsibility for assisting cultural adaptation: "*After I came, social media helped me. When I have a problem. When I wanted to open a bank account, when I want to extend the visa, I was asking. Sometimes I got help from Finnish like this too.*"

4.4 Social media applications

The participants of this study utilize social media for both individual and social communicating purposes. The functions and tools of social media are different toward the original and new culture. They are keeping daily contact with their family and friends (individual purpose) mostly through What's app and telegram chat and groups. Facebook, YouTube channel TV, and telegram channels and groups update them for social and political news (social purpose). The participants profit by What's app, Facebook messenger, telegram texting as the communication tools to call or text to their friends in Finland (individual purpose) and Facebook is usually used for receiving information, organizing meeting or events in Finland (social purpose)
Telegram is the frequent application for texting among Iranians and What's app is usually used for making audio and video call. Facebook messenger is usually used for texts and call outside of Iran because it is filtered in Iran. Although many Iranians are getting news from two Farsi channels of the satellite through YouTube link, telegram groups and channels are the easier portals for updating them about their family, friends, and news of Iran. (Fig. 2).
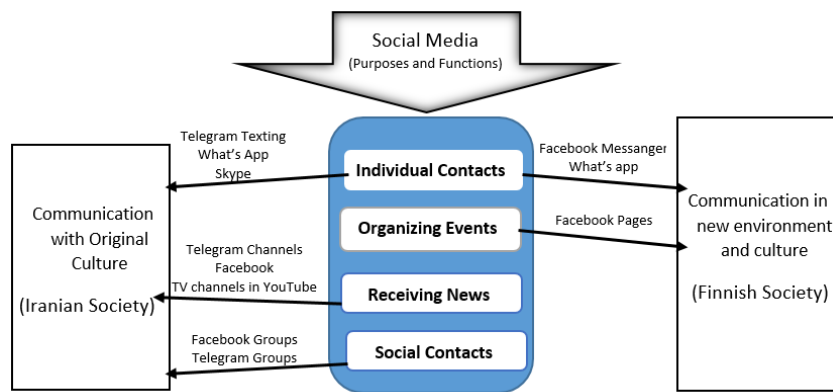

Fig 1: Purpose and functions of utilizing social media application for Iranian students in Finland

5   Discussion and Conclusion

Communication is considered the main key to cultural adaptation [22]. Entering a new culture and making communication is a challenging and stressful process for every foreigner. On the other hand, nowadays, social media becomes a daily activity, which provides audio and video communication, facilitates finding and sharing information and helps the process of socializing. The social media seems more beneficial for immigrants and international students due to reducing loneliness and rootlessness by making a connection between them and their family and friends in their home country. Results of the study demonstrated how Iranian tertiary-level students experience stress in their communication with Finnish and Iranians in Finland. Following the non-linear growth in the process of cultural integration, social media is assumed as the communication facilitator for connecting the participants to their family and friends in their home culture and acts as the bridge to attach them to their old culture.
Although all the Iranian students who interviewed are using the different kinds of social media in their daily activities and many of them have used the forums like Applyabroad, Facebook or telegram groups to get help for admission and accommodation process, very few of them claim that social media have been useful for their cultural adaptation. They believe face-to-face communication and friendship has helped them more in the process of cultural integration. Their claims are inconsistent with the results of previous studies. Many studies introduce social media

as a beneficial application for enhancing cultural adaptation. Facebook is reported as the potential tool for reducing acculturation stress among East Asian students in the United States [43] and it is shown beneficial for enhancing cultural adaptation among Chinese students in the United States [31]. Further, another researcher [32] demonstrated that Facebook and Renren influenced Chinese cultural orientation language proficiency, and length of stay in the U.S. In other studies, social media has been acknowledged to reduce the stress of immigrant in the face with the cultural shock or some other issues, which relates to studying abroad like Fear of Missing Out [44] and decreases their stress [26]. Further, Facebook has been identified as helpful social media for the student's adaptation through facilitating knowledge exchange, alleviating apprehension, and enabling socialization and building community [45; 33]. The current study demonstrated Facebook and Telegram as the accepted and common social media among Iranian students in Finland. They are using Facebook messenger for individual contacts and Facebook pages for organizing events. There are few posts in the Facebook pages of Iranian students than telegram groups, but only participating in these existing groups may reduce their cultural stress and loneliness. Nevertheless, the students who overcome their challenges in communication in the new environment and do not feel much distance between themselves and Finnish people do believe in the adequacy of social media to develop their cultural adaptation and competence. They believe social media did not help them in their adaptation as their face-to-face friendship had help. This statement shows participants' image and expectation of social media for communication with Finnish is more than what they have experienced. It clarifies that social media does not satisfy their expectations concerning to be a portal for connecting between Finnish and Iranians or the required cultural content.

Obviously, social media is limited to make a ground to communicate the different cultures because of the language barrier. It has reported as the serious issue of international students for cultural adaptation in the previous studies [19; 20; 21; 14]. Hence, regarding the language barrier, utilizing social media for being the route for communicating international students or immigrant with the local people is a further step in the use of technology for cultural adaptation [46; 47].

The current study did not show the language barrier as the impediment for communicating with Finnish people. This assertion may limit to the context of the study. According to Official Statistics of Finland (OSF) more than 90% of Finnish residents know at least one foreign language and at least 82% of Finnish people are well in English skills [48]. On the other hand, all participants are studying their education in English language. Yet, lack of language skills and job are identified as two important requirements for linking the participants to Finnish society. In fact, the findings of this study inconsistent with previous studies [32; 33] indicated social media did not help the participant to develop their language skills due to existing literature contexts as the United States and United Kingdom that are English speaking countries. The ability of Finnish people to understand English reduces necessity of learning Finnish language for the foreigners, particularly, international students who are capable in speaking English and making them to communicate with Finnish people. It somehow makes learning Finnish more difficult for English speakers. However, ability in communication with Finnish people does not make Iranian students feel as being member of Finnish society.

The results of the present research along with the previous studies have shown the efficiency of social media as the communication tool. It facilitates individual communication among students. Further, it prepares the appropriate path for students in the same culture to share their knowledge and assist their cultural adaptation process. The context of this study is Iranian tertiary-level students living in Finland, therefore this finding is transferable to similar contexts such as students or immigrants from other nationalities in Finland. Further, the findings may be applicable to other Nordic countries because of the similarity in socio- cultural conditions of the context. However, the current functions of social media in the present study neither increased students' knowledge toward Finnish culture nor provided the environment for communicating between Finnish and Iranian students. Accordingly, the more studies in the different contexts are suggested due to finding new ways for utilizing social media for cultural adaptation.

Social media is potential for making an environment to connect Finnish and international students particularly Iranian students. Further, social media is talented to provide cultural information for immigrant students living in Finland. It is capable for sharing knowledge, experiences and attitudes toward the new culture and develop cultural adaptation of consumers. This study trusts that social media yet, is not employed and utilized for its full potential to enhance cultural adaptation. Accordingly, the implication of these results suggests designing the particular social platforms with the purpose of developing cultural adaptation.

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