SOCIAL MEDIA AS A CULTURAL ADAPTATION TOOL IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION: THE CASE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN TÜRKİYE

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ABSTRACT

In the words of the German philosopher Hegel, it is 'in accordance with the spirit of the era' that people continue their academic careers in another country in order to adapt their equipment to the globalizing world within the scope of the integration of the world. The phenomenon of international studentship means that individuals leave their own countries to study, and international student mobility in this context has increased in recent years. Going to another country and staying there for a certain period of time brings with it the obligation to adapt to the cultural values of that country. The use of social media can be beneficial in order to get through this adaptation process without any problems. These platforms can enable foreign students to integrate into a new society faster and enrich their cultural experiences by providing information sharing, communication and interaction opportunities. In this context, in this study, the effects of the use of social media in the cultural adaptation processes of international students, and the possible consequences of the social media phenomenon, which spread to almost all cultural areas, were investigated. The sample of the research consists of fifteen international students studying at Yalova University. In the research, semi-structured interview technique was used as in-depth data collection method. As a result of the study, it has been determined that international students use social media as an important tool for choosing the country and university to study in and for cultural harmony, unlike similar studies conducted in Türkiye.

Keywords: International Student, Cultural Adaptation, Social Media.

KÜRESELLEŞME BAĞLAMINDA BİR KÜLTÜREL UYUM ARACI OLARAK SOSYAL MEDYA: TÜRKİYE'DEKİ ULUSLARARASI ÖĞRENCİLER ÖRNEĞİ

ÖZ

Dünyanın bütünleşmesi kapsamında insanların donanımlarını küreselleşen dünyaya uyarlamak için başka bir ülkede akademik kariyerlerine devam etmeleri, Alman filozof Hegel'in deyimiyle 'dönemin ruhuna uygundur'. Uluslararası öğrencilik olgusu, bireylerin eğitim almak için kendi ülkelerini terk etmesi anlamına gelmektedir ve bu kapsamda görülen uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği son yıllarda artış

göstermiştir. Başka bir ülkeye gitmek ve orada belli bir süre kalmak, o ülkenin kültürel değerlerine uyum sağlama zorunluluğunu da beraberinde getirmektedir. Bu uyum sürecini sorunsuz şekilde atlatmak için sosyal medya kullanımı faydalı olabilmektedir. Bu platformlar, bilgi paylaşımı, iletişim ve etkileşim imkanları sunarak yabancı öğrencilerin yeni bir topluma daha hızlı entegre olmalarını ve kültürel deneyimlerini zenginleştirmelerini sağlayabilmektedir. Bu bağlamda bu çalışmada, uluslararası öğrencilerin kültürel uyum süreçlerinde sosyal medya kullanımının etkileri araştırılmış ve bu konu kapsamında hemen hemen tüm kültürel alanlara yayılan sosyal medya olgusunun olası sonuçları araştırılmıştır. Araştırmanın örneklemini Yalova Üniversitesi'nde öğrenim gören on beş uluslararası öğrenci oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmada derinlemesine veri toplama yöntemi olarak yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme tekniği kullanılmıştır. Çalışma sonucunda Türkiye'de yapılan benzer çalışmalardan farklı olarak uluslararası öğrencilerin sosyal medyayı eğitim alacakları ülke ve üniversiteyi seçme ve kültürel uyum konusunda önemli bir araç olarak kullandıkları tespit edilmiştir.

INTRODUCTION

Transformations of the world in recent years have been tried to be defined by various concepts by scientists. One of the most important concepts defining this transformation is the concept of globalization. Globalization is a process of integration of the world in many ways such as politics, economy, culture and society. In this sense, although its direction or speed is different, globalization is a two-sided concept because it includes a reciprocity (Kürkçü, 2013: 3). With the phenomenon of globalization, distances have become closer, and almost all people and societies have become interconnected.

There is a dynamism in all layers of social life, from commerce to popular culture, from tourism to education, in connection with the phenomenon of globalization. With the flexibility of the borders of the countries, opening the entrance and exit of the people of the world, the facilitation of international mobility, the situation of migrating to other countries for education, albeit temporarily, is a fairly common normal image of today's world. In this context, the number of international students coming to Türkiye for education is quite high. It is possible to evaluate the application of young people to international education with the concept of freedom of movement (Bauman, 2020: 9), which is an important element of the globalization process.

When we look at the number of students studying in a country other than their own country around the world, it is seen that the number of international students, which was around 800 thousand in the 1970s, increased to 4.5 million in 2012, and this number increased to 6.3 million in 2021. Again, according to the data announced on the numbers in our country:

"There is an increasing trend in the number of international students included in the Turkish higher education system. While the number of international students in our country was 16,656 in the 2000/01 academic year, this number made a great leap to 72.178 in the 2014/15 academic year and reached 87.903 in 2015/16. In the 2016/17 academic year, this figure increased by 23% and reached 108,076" (Council of Higher Education [YÖK], 2017).

Looking at the more recent statistics of YÖK, it is seen that there are more than 260,000 foreign higher education students in the Turkish higher education system as of 2022. As the numbers have increased exponentially over the years, it is seen that YÖK has determined to increase this number as a strategic goal and aims to further increase the number of international students in Türkiye by providing various scholarships and supports to international students (YÖK, 2022).

International students can provide cultural and economic benefits to the countries they are studying in. Each student brings with them different cultural heritages that diversify the population and increase awareness of other cultures. The different perspectives of international students can also provide

different skills and knowledge that add intellectual capital to the workforce of the country where they are studying. However, this phenomenon also brings about a host of challenges for international students that necessitate careful consideration. One significant challenge pertains to cultural and linguistic adjustments (Ward & Masgoret, 2004). International students often face difficulties in adapting to a new cultural milieu and navigating language barriers, which can impede effective communication, social integration, and academic performance. Moreover, the experience of homesickness and a sense of isolation further compound these challenges. Another noteworthy concern involves academic disparities and varying educational standards across countries (Marginson, 2012). International students may encounter discrepancies in teaching methodologies, evaluation practices, and expectations, which can lead to feelings of academic inadequacy and hinder their learning progress. Additionally, economic constraints and financial pressures present substantial obstacles, as tuition fees, living expenses, and currency exchange rates may disproportionately affect international students, limiting their access to quality education (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

As seen, the advantages and disadvantages of being an international student is being researched since many years. The increase in the number of international students in the higher education system has made them the object of academic studies. Looking at the studies on international students in the Turkish literature; it is seen that there are many studies such as Gülnar's (2011) study titled Acculturation and Media Use in Foreign Students, Özçetin's (2013) published Master's Thesis titled Factors Affecting the Social Adaptation of Foreign Students Going to Higher Education, Levent and Karaveli's (2013) International Policies for the Education of Students and Suggestions for Türkiye, Kethüda's (2015) A Research on International Student Mobility in Türkiye, Yıldırım and Akbulut's (2017) An International Public Relations on Türkiye's Reputation The Effect of Education Programs Abroad as a Tool for Diplomacy and Cultural Diplomacy: A Study on Foreign Students in Türkiye, Karaman's (2018) published Master's Thesis titled Intercultural Communication Sensitivity of Foreign University Students in the Process of Socio-Cultural Adaptation, Sayımer and Bayraktar's (2020) study titled The Use of Fashion as a Tool for Social Cohesion and Resistance in International Students' Identity Performances: The Case of Kocaeli University and, finally, the research of Yılmaz and Güçlü (2021) titled The Outlook of International Student Mobility in Türkiye.

In this study, which is handled by taking a global phenomenon differently from other studies, the effects of social media use on the cultural adaptation processes of international students in Türkiye is investigated. It is important to determine the possible results of social media platforms which affect almost all cultural areas within the scope of this subject, in order to increase the motivation of international students. The sample of the current study consists of international undergraduate and graduate students studying in various departments at Yalova University. In the study, the semi-structured interview technique was used as a method in order to collect in-depth data.

In the current study, firstly the conceptual framework is revealed. In this context, the concepts of globalization, international studentship, cultural adaptation and finally social media are discussed. Afterwards, the findings of the research are presented. Finally, a discussion of the data obtained in the research in the light of similar studies in the literature and various suggestions are provided for relevant institutions.

A Brief Look at Globalization
In the formation of globalization, the competition between the blocks of the world that was formed during the Cold War period has been effective in the world politically. Subsequently, in the atmosphere that emerged as a result of the collapse of the USSR bloc, the capitalist bloc's declaration of victory on a world scale gave impetus to globalization. In addition to political transformations in globalization, economic transformations along with the developments in information and communication technologies have also had a significant impact (Giddens, 2012: 430-435).

To summarize the concept of globalization; "*It is possible to express the distance becoming less important in every field and the process of integration of the world in political, economic, social and cultural fields*" (Kürkçü, 2013: 3). As Kürkçü has stated, the integration of the world in the phenomenon of globalization is handled multidimensionally. According to most studies in the literature, the concept of globalization basically refers to an integration that occurs in the economy. In economic terms, globalization means that the economies of the countries are intertwined with the world economy, that is, the world becomes a single market. In other words, it is possible to summarize economic globalization as the intensification of economic ties between countries and the convergence of countries as a result of the increase in commodity, capital and labor pass-through between countries, following the innovations in information and communication technologies. However, globalization also has political, social and cultural dimensions. In the socio-cultural dimension of globalization, the situation in which elements such as value judgments, consumption habits, clothing, traditions and customs in all areas of social life begin to resemble each other in the universal dimension comes to the fore. In the political dimension of globalization, it is mentioned that the sovereignty rights of the nation-state gradually decrease, international contacts increase in the administrative systems, international interactions on the basis of non-governmental organizations, human rights and freedoms increase, and the nation-state has to share some of its powers with international organizations (Çelik, 2015: 68- 69).

Based on all these data, it is seen that individuals are obliged to carry their world of thought beyond local patterns with the phenomenon of globalization. In particular, the transformations in communication technologies can take us to other parts of the world as well as bringing the world to our feet. This journey is not limited to the digital world. Now people can make global, that is, cross-border plans to build a better life for themselves. The phenomenon of international students, which emerged in the context of the globalization of education, also goes hand in hand with the concepts of global knowledge economy and information society.

International Studentship as a Global Phenomenon
According to the definition of UNESCO; "*An international student is a person who leaves national or regional borders for educational purposes and is registered as a student outside the country of his/her nationality*". According to the definition of OECD on the other hand; "*Foreign student is a person who is given the right to participate in a certain education program in an accredited institution outside his/her own country within the framework of visa or special permits*" (YÖK, 2017: 7).

There may be various reasons why individuals want to study in different countries in the global world conditions. Yılmaz and Güçlü (2021: 48) list the factors affecting the country preferences of international students in the table they created by using various sources: quality of education, cost of education, employment opportunities, proximity to home, corporate reputation, attractiveness of place of study, security, cost of living and advertising-promotion etc.

When we look at the number of students studying in a country other than their own country around the world, it is seen that the number of international students, which was approximately 800 thousand in the 1970s, reached 4.5 million in 2012 (YÖK, 2017) and 6.3 million in 2021(*istatistik.yok.gov.tr*). The United States has the largest share of the international student pie, with 16% of all students enrolled in higher education in this country. While this rate is 13% in the United Kingdom, it is 6% in Germany (Yılmaz & Güçlü, 2021: 246). International students have economic, scientific and cultural benefits to the host countries. International student mobility is considered as an income item that contributes to the country's economy with tuition fees and living expenses. International students' accommodation, catering, entertainment, etc. all living expenses provide a hot money inflow to the economy of the host countries. In addition, international students contribute to the advancement of science in these countries by participating in scientific activities in the host country (Kehm, 2005: 19). From this point of view, it is understood that there is a competition between countries in terms of attracting international students to their own countries.

According to the latest data, it has been determined that 260,151 people have been educated as international students in Türkiye as of 2022. Figure 1 shows the change in the number of international students in the last 20 years.
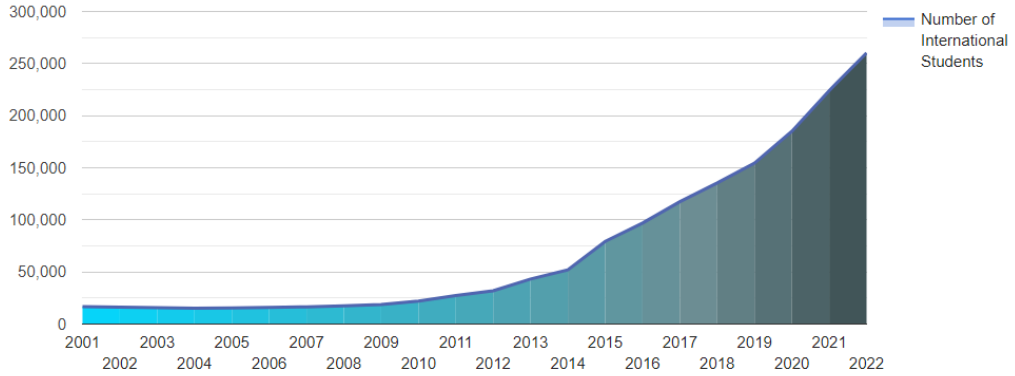

Figure 1: Number of international students in Türkiye by year
Source: https://www.studyinturkiye.gov.tr/StudyinTurkey/_PartStatistic E.T. 22.02.2023

When Figure 1 is examined, it is seen that the number of international students in the Turkish higher education system between 2001 and 2010 is very close. Especially after 2011, a breakthrough was made and there was a significant increase in the number of international students in higher education. In this regard, the Internationalization Strategy Document in Higher Education 2018-2022 was prepared by YÖK in 2017 and Türkiye's orientation on this issue is expressed as follows:

"Various strategies are being developed in order for the Turkish higher education system to become an international center of attraction and to gain more students and lecturers from more countries, and efforts are made to keep the dynamics of internationalization strong with the policies pursued in this area such as Bologna Process, TURQUAS Project, Erasmus and Erasmus+ programs, Türkiye Scholarships, Mevlâna Exchange Program, Joint Diploma Programs, Project-Based International Exchange Program, YABSIS Project, School Recognition and Equivalency Regulation, extension of doctoral students' stay in Türkiye after graduation, YÖK's start of granting scholarships to international students constitute some of the important initiatives that strengthen this process" (YÖK, 2017: 15).

It is clearly seen in Table 1 that the regulations issued and the programs implemented yielded the expected results. It is also known that there are millions of people who have to leave their country and migrate to Türkiye due to the war, intervention or internal turmoil in the Middle East in recent years. The intense out-migration to our country has caused various measures to be taken to regulate the access of refugees at the age of higher education to higher education in Türkiye. While there were 608 Syrian students enrolled in our higher education system in the academic year of 2011/12, this number increased to 15,052 in the academic year of 2016/17, because of the policies created mainly for Syrian refugees in Türkiye (YÖK, 2017: 33). It is seen that this number is 53,097 in the 2022/23 academic year (*studyinturkiye.gov.tr*). All these studies have enabled Türkiye to be among the top ten countries in the world in terms of the number of international higher education students (Aktaş, 2020).

In addition, the *Study in Türkiye* web page, which was established by YÖK International Relations Department in 2017, offers important advertising and promotion activities in this regard. *Study in Türkiye* is a new website established by the YÖK to inform international students about the Turkish

higher education system. On this web site, prospective students can choose the most suitable university for them according to the language of education, type, city or field of study with the search engine. Here, in addition to general information about the Turkish higher education system, there is a variety of information on the subject such as scholarships, experiences of international students, living conditions, Turkish culture, etc. The website serves primarily in three languages, Turkish, English and Arabic (*studyinturkiye.gov.tr*). In the light of these data, it is possible to claim that the number of international higher education students in Türkiye will increase in the coming years.

While the figures are increasing gradually, it is important to focus on a more humane and individual aspect of international studentship. Even if international students are from neighboring and similar cultures-beliefs, international studentship requires a cultural adaptation process. In this context, the concept of cultural adaptation will be mentioned at this stage.

Cultural Adaptation as a Necessity in the Acculturation Process
The concept of culture is a concept that is used in many disciplines and has many definitions. Turkish Language Institution defines the word culture as:

"All of the material and spiritual values created in the historical and social development process and the tools used in creating them and transmitting them to the next generations, showing the extent of human dominance over their natural and social environment" (www.tdk.gov.tr).

Within the framework of this definition, it is seen that every person has a culture due to his social characteristics. However, in today's global world, intercultural interaction and the contact of cultures are more common than in past ages. Intercultural adaptation requires individuals to make changes in their lifestyles and the way of communication to adapt to a new culture. In the globalizing world, many people experience intercultural adaptation processes as cultures are much more interdependent than before (Sawyer & Chen, 2012: 154).

Knowing the stages of intercultural adaptation is a point to consider when connecting with social media use. According to the findings of Lysgaard (1955), a study of Norwegian students studying in the United States years ago found that adaptation follows a U-shaped curve over time. The person feels that adaptation is easy and successful in the first place, then comes a crisis stage where he feels less adapted, lonely and unhappy, and then the person starts to adapt better again and integrates more into the community that is alien to him. Communication is a very important element in this process. One can learn most about the host culture through communicating local people and so gain emotional and lingual adaptation.

The word adaptation is associated with change, and means adapting to a new situation that has arisen. In this context, adaptation refers to the strategies used in the acculturation process and its results. The cultural interaction that occurs as a result of the encounter of two cultures is explained with the concept of "acculturation". Acculturation is the cultural change that occurs as a result of the connection of two different cultures and is experienced on an individual scale (Berry, 1992). The duration of residence in the new cultural environment, language skills, cultural proximity or distance, and contact levels with the host culture also play an important role in the adaptation process (Gülnar & Balcı, 2011: 104). Cultural adaptation is indispensable for a healthy social life for individuals living in another country for various reasons such as immigration, short and medium-term work, education and so on. Considering all these factors, the new culture is a reality that needs to be learned and discovered with both its material and spiritual elements, and most importantly, it should be included within life practices.

International studentship forces people to come into contact with and adapt to new and different cultures in order to continue their lives in better conditions through immigration, asylum or working abroad. Social media, one of the new media platforms that socially connects all people in the globalizing world,

has the potential to facilitate the cultural adaptation of international students in this adaptation process. In this context, social media platforms will be mentioned at this stage.

The Communication Tool of the Century: Social Media
Today, communication and media technologies are an important factor that surrounds and affects human behavior (Yıldırım, 2021: 157). Although the Internet technology was invented in the 1960s, the period between 1993 and 2003, when the Internet directly affected the life of the individual, is called the Web 1.0 period in the literature. Web 1.0, which offered a one-way content flow with extremely weak audio/visual content due to its limited bandwidth, was working mostly as an environment where written documents were presented. The Web 2.0 era, which was developed in the following period, brought the Internet world to a much higher level. Thanks to Web 2.0, individuals who have become users in the Internet environment have had the opportunity to create their own content and share them with other people. The emergence of applications that do not require a long training process, do not require any design skills for the user, and all requests of the user are considered, have enabled the Internet world to reach more users. Almost all of today's popular websites are the product of Web 2.0 technology, which makes interaction possible. Therefore, web pages or applications that allow users to produce, upload and edit content are called Web 2.0 (Kara, 2013: 28-32).

The mentioned technological developments have changed and diversified the media. With the emergence of forums towards the end of the 1990s, the ability of individuals to express their own ideas actively and to begin to share these ideas with other users of the forums constitute the first core of today's social media (Kızılarslan, 2012: 28). In the following years, social media tools have diversified inexorably. With Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010: 61) words; "*Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content*". From this definition, it is seen that social media is a new media tool that attaches importance to user interaction and to the content created by users themselves.

Social media compares and connects all cultures of the world that has access to new media technologies in a way that realizes the *global village* concept of the famous communication theorist McLuhan. (McLuhan & Powers, 1989). People who migrate to another country for short or long term for different reasons use various communication channels both to adapt to the society they have just entered and to stay in touch with the social environment. Accordingly, since it is known that social media has social, physical and cultural effects on its users (Sawyer & Chen, 2012: 156), it is possible to suggest that it is the most authoritative medium that will facilitate cultural adaptation today.

The fact that individuals are not only consumers but also content producers in social media has significantly changed their social lives. Independent of time and place, social relationships are also transferred to digital channels. Some of the business, education and cultural activities in the life streams can be carried out through these channels. Therefore, social media channels are becoming an important part of life. Individuals can use social media for purposes such as learning a new language, recognizing other cultural values, and etc. For all problems encountered in daily life, solutions may be sought by using these channels. Therefore, in addition to being aware of what is happening, all vital plans can be carried out through these channels.

The important position of social media in an individual's life forms the basis of this research. In case of immigrating to another country for any reason, people can use social media to obtain information about the host country, to establish and maintain relationships, and to be informed about the events in their own country during intercultural adaptation to the host country environment (Sawyer & Chen, 2012: 151). In this context, in line with the research carried out in this study, the subject of international studentship in the social sense and the position of social media in providing cultural adaptation will be examined.

METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

This study examines the effects of social media use in the cultural adaptation processes of international students. The sample of the study consists of fifteen international students studying at Yalova University. Thirteen undergraduate and two graduate students studying in various departments of Yalova University were interviewed in digital environment. The interviews were recorded and later transformed verbatim into text. Since the purpose of qualitative research is to obtain detailed qualitative data rather than quantitative majority, the sample of the study was deemed sufficient in terms of diversity and number.

In the study, semi-structured interview technique was used as a method in order to collect more in-depth data. Semi-structured interview technique is more advantageous than structured interview technique in terms of flexibility. Again, as in the structured interview technique, although there is a pre-prepared interview protocol, the interviewer may request that the answers be opened and detailed with other questions or sub-questions depending on the course of the interview. Because of these differences, semi-structured interview technique provides researchers with a certain level of standardization and facilitates research (Türnüklü, 2000: 547).

In the interviews, questions consisting of three parts were asked to the participants. In the first part, the participants were asked questions such as age, department of education, their class year, their home country, their Turkish-English language level, their housing style, and their thoughts about education in Türkiye. In the second part, questions about their cultural experiences were asked. And finally the third part consisted of questions about the support level of social media on their cultural adaptation. Each of the interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes, and the interviews were then deciphered and the answers were categorized thematically.

FINDINGS

The general information of the students participating in the research is given in Table 1. The gender distribution of the students participating in the research is 6 females and 9 males. The age range is 18 to 30. Two of the participants are graduate students and 13 of them are undergraduate students. The participants of the research consist of 5 Syrians, 3 Iraqis, 2 Palestinians, 2 Yemenis and one each Azerbaijan, Senegal and Uzbekistan citizens. Also, in order to ensure diversity, the participants were selected from students studying in different departments. Finally, the time interval of the participants in Türkiye varies between 4 months to 11 years.

Table 1: Responses of the participants to questions 1-6.

	Gender	Age	Department	Year	Nationality	Time in Türkiye
P1	F	20	Communication Arts	2nd Year	Uzbekistan	3 Years
P2	F	22	Polymer Engineering	2nd Year	Iraq	6 Years
P3	F	22	Polymer Engineering	2nd Year	Iraq	5 Years
P4	M	20	Polymer Engineering	2nd Year	Syria	4,5 Years
P5	F	23	Nursing	1st Year	Yemen	11 Years
P6	M	30	Law Masters	Course Period	Iraq	3 Years
P7	F	30	Nursing	1st Year	Azerbaijan	4 Months

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P8	M	21	Political Science and Public Administration	Language Prep	Senegal	7 Months
P9	F	27	Accounting and Finance Masters	Thesis writing Period	Syria	10 Years
P10	M	19	Sports Management	1st Year	Palestine	1 Year
P11	M	19	Electrical Electronics Engineering	3rd Year	Syria	7 Years
P12	M	21	Electrical Electronics Engineering	1st Year	Yemen	3 Years
P13	M	20	Energy Systems Engineering	3rd Year	Syria	4 Years
P14	M	18	Chemical Engineering	2nd Year	Syria	4 Years
P15	M	20	Physiotherapy	Language Prep	Palestine	1 Year

A Preferred Country for Higher Education: Türkiye
Most of the participants stated that they did not live in another country other than their own country and Türkiye. Participant 9 and other participants similarly expressed their *reason for choosing Türkiye to study at university* by emphasizing the quality of education, cheapness and the suitability of living conditions compared to their own country:

P9: *Türkiye is a country that is the first choice for most international students. Türkiye has a higher education system with many university and department options. University fees in Türkiye are also very affordable compared to the rest of the world. Living conditions are also very suitable. It is also a religiously tolerant country.*

Based on the answers given, it is possible to summarize the main features that make Türkiye preferred by international students in higher education as geographical proximity, variety of universities and departments to be preferred, affordable tuition fees on a world scale, and cultural characteristics. Relatedly, all of the participants expressed their satisfaction with studying in Türkiye.

Moreover, almost all of the participants stated that they plan to continue their lives in Türkiye after completing their university education:

P1: *The economy in our country is worse than Türkiye, so I do not want to return to my country.*

Based on these answers, it is seen that Türkiye stands out as the country where international students plan not only to study at university but also to spend the rest of their lives. For some other participants, it is seen that Türkiye is the second choice especially after Europe in terms of living:

P9: *If I have a chance to continue my education in Western countries, I would like to try. If not, I want to live in Türkiye.*

The Help of Social Media in Making Decisions
One of the most important findings of the study is that the participants benefited from social media to a great extent in deciding which country and university they will study in:

P9: *I learned a lot about Türkiye. One of the reasons I preferred Turkey is that I have a lot of information from social media.*

P2: *I especially follow the pages about Turkey. I got all the information about university entrance conditions from social media. I contacted Turkish students on social media and got information from them about the department and university.*
P11: *I decided studying in Yalova through the information I got from social media.*

As can be seen, according to the data obtained in this study, it is possible to suggest that international students benefit from social media a lot in choosing a country and university and this preference is not misleading for them.

Social Media as a Cultural and Academic Adaptation Tool
All of the participants in the study stated that they use social media and almost all of the participants stated that they have Turkish friends on their social media accounts which helped them learn Turkish and adapt in all dimensions more easily:

P1: *I learned Turkish through social media. I learned Turkish by constantly messaging and talking with Turkish friends on social media. This way I adapted more easily.*
P6: *I texted my Turkish friends on social networks to learn Turkish. It has helped me a lot.*
P13: *Thanks to social media, I can find a house in Turkey, find a job, find friends, and follow the academic activities of the university. It benefits me a lot.*
P14: *I can say that I got to know Turkish culture through social media.*

The prominent point in their responses to the question about *how social media contributes to their adaptation process to Türkiye* is that being able to obtain institutional information from social media platforms about the education they receive makes the education here easier for international students and because it has the quality of interpersonal communication in terms of adaptation to school, classroom, *WhatsApp* groups are more functional:

P1: *Social media helped me a lot in adapting to Türkiye. It was a new thing for me as it was not used in my country and I followed mostly accounts and people from Türkiye. So this gave me an advantage. I follow the official accounts of the university. It helps with announcements.*
P7: *I follow the official accounts of the university and the department. However, it does not contribute like real person accounts. WhatsApp groups are more functional and interactive.*

On the other hand, the necessity of providing language support in social media content for international students at the point of adaptation to the education and institution appears as a footnote:

P4: *In the country I come from, official institutions do not use social media accounts much. Having social media accounts of the university and department in Türkiye makes our job easier. But the interaction could be stronger. Here official accounts don't have language support. Newcomers are having a hard time.*

CONCLUSION
Communication is the most important element that will help individuals who have to migrate to a new country for any reason and time interval, and adapt to the new culture. In today's digital world, social media is the medium in which young individuals prefer to communicate most, even with their closest relatives. Social media, which facilitates, accelerates and colorizes mutual communication, also offers very useful opportunities for young people who experience international studentship. Through social media platforms, international students can communicate with individuals both from their homeland and from the country where they study, and they can obtain information that will facilitate their adaptation.

Educational preferences of young people to invest in their future are now beyond the borders of home countries, as indicated by the statistical data. In this respect, international studentship has become a reality of today. Therefore, world states see this phenomenon as a commodity and compete to attract

international students to their countries. It is seen that Türkiye has become a country that has a say in this competition as a result of the positive steps it has taken, especially in the last ten years.

In the intercultural adaptation process, individuals use social media for various purposes such as getting to know other cultures and countries, establishing relationships with friends and classmates, and being informed about events from their own countries. In the sample of international students studying at Yalova University, it has been determined in the current study that students from countries with similar beliefs and cultures prefer to be international students in Türkiye. According to the findings, the fact that more appropriate and similar quality education is provided compared to other countries in the world that provide good education makes Türkiye an attractive country for the participants of the research. The preference of Turkey, especially in terms of cheap and high quality education, brings a solution to the global education problems that Western countries offer very expensive education due to their currencies.

More importantly, it was stated by the international students who participated in the current research that social media plays a very important role in deicsion making about which country and university to apply. Even when they are in their own country, international students can obtain sufficient and correct information to choose the countries and universities that may be suitable for them through social media. Moreover, social media also helps with the cultural adaptation process, especially in learning the language of the country. Likewise, it has been stated that social media is an important source of information in terms of recognizing the cultural values and understandings of the country. Similarly, some studies investigating the relationship between the phenomenon of migration and the use of communication technologies (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014; McGregor & Siegel, 2013) and studies measuring the effect of social media on cultural adaptation and acculturation (Tüfekçi, 2008; Çömlekçi & Bozkanat, 2019) found that learning the new language helps international students increase cultural exchange.

According to further results of the current research, it is seen that international students generally use social media channels efficiently both as a primary source of information in their host country, city, university and department preferences, and in their cultural adaptation processes. This finding obtained in our study is in line with the results of many studies in the literature. For instance, Ryan et al. (2011), investigating the role of social networking sites in ensuring the cultural adaptation of international doctoral students studying in the United States with the method of auto-ethnography found that social media supports the adaptation of international students in the form of facilitating the exchange of information, alleviating their anxiety and helping them to socialize and build community in the host country. Similarly, Ju and Jia (2016: 82-83), who collected data by survey and diary method found that social media communication has an important role after face-to-face communication in the acculturation process of Chinese students studying in the USA.

Another important result obtained from our research is that international students can benefit from the official social media accounts of the universities, faculties, institutes and departments that they apply as information sources in terms of calendars and announcements; but that this is not enough. The participants of the current study stated that the most functional social network is the classroom *WhatsApp* groups, which provide mostly interpersonal communication. Based on this finding, it is necessary to make suggestions to use the official social media accounts of the institutions more actively, to provide foreign language support for new or prospective international students, and to use them more interactively in accordance with the spirit of social media. Relatedly, Rui and Wang (2015: 406) found that social media platforms facilitate intercultural adaptation depending on how proficient international students are in using the host language, who they communicate with on social media, and how they use social media.

As a result, in the light of all the results obtained in this study, it is possible to suggest that social media helps international students learn the culture, values and characteristics of the country they come to

study and provide their cultural adaptation in a faster and healthier way. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by presenting important results for Türkiye regarding the intersection of the phenomenon of international students as an important outcome of the global world, where all humanity and countries are connected, especially digitally, and social media, which is the most prominent platforms of new media technologies.

To address the challenges of globalized education, educational institutions must implement comprehensive support mechanisms, including cultural orientation programs, language assistance, academic mentoring, and financial aid initiatives. Such measures can enhance the overall well-being and academic success of international students, contributing to a more inclusive and globally diversified education landscape (Leask & Bridge, 2013). After providing these basic measures, social media will fill the necessary gap in communication and adaptation successfully.

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