

Posts and Pathways: Social media and Migration

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Abstract: *This paper provides a comprehensive literature review on the relationship between social media and migration. It discusses the role of social media in shaping migration behaviors, experiences, and outcomes, as well as its influence on pre-migration planning, integration processes, and transnational connections. The review categorizes research into three main themes: social media in pre-migration information, influence on migrants' incorporation into host societies, and the preservation of transnational ties among immigrant communities. Theoretical frameworks are applied to understand these dynamics, particularly affecting social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), transnationalism (Glick Schiller et al., 1992), and agency (Castells, 2009). By synthesizing interdisciplinary findings, this paper aims to provide a conceptual foundation focusing on the importance of social media in the migration process. The conclusion suggests avenues for further exploration, particularly concerning the implications of digital divides on migrant experiences and highlights the implications of social media interactions for both migrants and host societies, ultimately suggesting directions for future research.*

Keywords: social media, migration, relationship, process

INTRODUCTION

Migration is a complex phenomenon influenced by a variety of factors, including economic opportunities, political (in)stability, and social networks. While traditional migration theories have focused primarily on push and pull factors, recent studies highlight the significance of social media in shaping migrants' decisions and/ or experiences. This literature review aims to explore existing research on this intersection and provide a theoretical framework to better understand the nuanced dynamics.

The relationship between social media and migration has garnered increasing attention in recent years, driven by the dual forces of globalization and technological advancement. Digital platforms offer opportunities for migrants to access information, connect with networks, and navigate complex migratory processes, reshaping their experiences in profound ways (Mazzucato, 2009). Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp, have become essential tools for migrants seeking information, connection, and support (Madianou and Miller, 2012). Social media has a profound impact on the decision-making processes of migrants, shaping both their perceptions and choices about migration. For instance, Indonesian student migrants at the University of Groningen often rely on social media to gather information about potential destinations, educational opportunities, and the experiences of other migrants (Hidayati, 2018). These platforms not only provide practical information but also foster emotional support networks that can reduce the psychological barriers to migration. By enabling prospective migrants to visualize their life in a new country and connect with those who have already made the move, social media lowers the threshold for migration and facilitates more informed and confident decision-making.

This literature review critically examines the existing body of research on this topic, aiming to highlight key themes and identify theoretical frameworks that can help understand social media's influence on migration processes or decisions.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper, a literature review was used to recognize the complex relationship between social media and migration. The main research questions are directed towards: What are the complex dimensions of the influence of social media on migration?; What are the theoretical perspectives of their connection?; How do major social media influence country presentations?

A systematic search was conducted using key academic databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, and Web of Science. The search utilized a combination of relevant keywords and phrases, such as: "social media and migration", "impact of social media on migration", "migration decision-making and social media", "social networks and migration", "digital communication in migration". Fields of articles published: sociology, communication studies, and migration studies. The only exclusion criteria was: Articles focusing solely on traditional media without addressing social media.

The extracted data was organized thematically based on significant findings, which included:

Social Media's Influence on Migration; Theoretical Perspectives; Different experiences about the influence of social media on migration; Social media channels used by migrants; The representation of destination countries on social media and migration trends; Social media and migration information; Social media platforms used for sharing migration-related content.

Theoretical background

Social Media's Influence on Migration

Migration trends have radically shifted over the centuries, influenced by various socio-political and economic factors. Historically, migration decisions were predominantly driven by tangible factors such as employment opportunities, political stability, and economic prosperity in destination countries (Hidayati, 2018). For instance, the 19th and early 20th centuries saw mass migrations from Europe to the Americas, largely driven by industrialization and the pursuit of better living conditions. However, the advent of globalization has added layers of complexity to these decisions, making it essential to understand the historical, geographical, and social contexts in which migration occurs (Hidayati, 2018). This context also sets the stage for examining the role of modern influences, such as social media, in shaping contemporary migration trends.

The rise of social media platforms has introduced a new dimension to the migration discourse. Over the last two decades, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have transformed how information is disseminated and consumed globally (Obi, Bartolini and D'Haese, 2020). These platforms offer real-time updates and personal narratives that can significantly influence potential migrants' perceptions of destination countries. For example, Iranian students increasingly rely on social media to make informed decisions about studying in countries like Sweden (Obi, Bartolini and D'Haese, 2020). The pervasive nature of social media has created virtual communities that provide support, share experiences, and offer advice, thereby reducing the uncertainties associated with migration. This digital interconnectedness has made the migration process more accessible and less daunting for many.

Initial research findings suggest that social media plays a pivotal role in the migration decision-making process. Early studies have shown that internet-based communication positively influences people's decisions to migrate by providing valuable information and fostering connections with diaspora communities (Agyemang and Ampofo, 2024). For instance, Indonesian student migrants at the University of Groningen have utilized social media extensively to navigate their migration journey (Cassar, Gauci, Bacchi and Corboy, 2016). These platforms not only help in gathering information but also in maintaining social ties and integrating into new communities. The evolving nature of social media

necessitates ongoing research to fully understand its impact, as it continues to shape how individuals perceive and undertake migration.

Theoretical Perspectives

Network theory and social capital offer significant insights into the dynamics of migration, particularly how migrant networks are established and maintained over time (Castelli, 2018). Social capital theory, in particular, explores the relationships and networks within a society that contribute to the movement of individuals (Bisung and J. Elliot, 2014). Migrant networks provide two essential types of capital: cooperation capital, which fosters collective action among migrants, and information capital, which facilitates access to crucial resources and opportunities (Jackson, 2020). These networks serve as vital conduits for information and support, making the migration process smoother and more manageable. In essence, social media platforms amplify these networks by enabling migrants to connect with both existing networks in the host country and potential migrants in their home country, thereby enhancing their social capital.

The push-pull theory, when examined through the lens of digital communication, reveals how social media influences migration by highlighting both the attractions and repulsions associated with migrating to a new location (Hou and Shiau, 2019). Social media platforms often accentuate the "pull" factors, such as better job opportunities, higher education, and improved living conditions, by showcasing success stories and positive experiences of those who have migrated (Negm, 2018). Conversely, they also highlight "push" factors, such as political instability, poor economic conditions, and lack of opportunities in the home country, which compel individuals to consider migrating. This dual role of social media in emphasizing both push and pull factors can significantly impact individuals' decisions to migrate, as they gain a more comprehensive understanding of the potential benefits and drawbacks of migration.

Technological determinism posits that technology itself is a driving force behind societal changes, including migration patterns (Leonardi and Jackson, 2004). According to this theory, advancements in digital communication technologies, particularly social media, have redefined how people perceive and interact with the concept of migration (Nkwam-Uwaoma and Ojiakor-Umenze, 2019). Social media platforms enable real-time communication and information exchange, making it easier for potential migrants to gather information about their destination and stay connected with their homeland (Alencar, 2017). This instantaneous access to information and social networks can reduce the uncertainties and risks associated with migration, thereby encouraging more people to consider relocating. Moreover, social media can help migrants integrate into their new communities by providing platforms for cultural exchange and support networks, further demonstrating the profound impact of technological advancements on migration patterns.

Different experiences about the influence of social media on migration

Analyzing migration flows through social media data provides a near real-time snapshot of migration patterns and integration levels in destination countries. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are used by migrants to share updates, communicate with family, and connect with fellow migrants, generating a wealth of data that researchers can tap into (Righi, 2019). By monitoring these interactions, researchers can gain insights into the scale and direction of migration flows, identifying trends that may not be immediately apparent through traditional data collection methods. Furthermore, this data offers a unique perspective on how well migrants are integrating into their new environments by observing their online interactions and participation in local communities.

Social media has a profound impact on the decision-making processes of migrants, shaping both their perceptions and choices about migration. These platforms not only provide practical information but also foster emotional support networks that can reduce the psychological barriers to migration. By enabling prospective migrants to visualize their life in a new country and connect with those who have already made the move, social media lowers the threshold for migration and facilitates more informed and confident decision-making.

Case studies of specific migrant communities reveal diverse ways in which social media is utilized during the migration process. Iranian students, for instance, have been found to use social media extensively to make decisions about studying abroad, particularly in Sweden (Dey and Fouladi, 2020). They leverage these platforms to access firsthand accounts and advice from current students, compare educational institutions, and navigate bureaucratic processes. Similarly, research on migrants in Ireland indicates that social media helps maintain a background awareness of friends and acquaintances, thereby supporting social bonding and community integration (Komito, 2011). These case studies highlight the multifaceted role of social media in both the logistical and emotional aspects of migration, underscoring its importance in contemporary migration dynamics.

Social media channels used by migrants

The primary social media channels used by migrants encompass a variety of platforms, but Facebook stands out as the most prevalent among them. This preference can be attributed to Facebook's extensive network, which facilitates easy connection with family and friends, a crucial aspect for migrants who seek to maintain ties with their home countries (Cassar, Gauci, Bacchi, 2016). While platforms like Twitter and LinkedIn also feature in the social media usage of migrants, their roles are considerably more limited. This is particularly evident among women migrants, who display a higher tendency to use these platforms compared to their male counterparts (Cassar, Gauci, Bacchi, 2016). However, it is essential to note that the type of information pursued by migrants can vary significantly, reflecting

the diverse needs within the migrant community (Cassar, Gauci, Bacchi, 2016). For example, asylum seekers exhibit a higher level of activity on Facebook, utilizing it not only for social connections but also to access crucial information regarding their rights and regulations in the host country (Cassar, Gauci, Bacchi, 2016). This highlights the multifaceted role of social media in the lives of migrants, where platforms serve as both social and informational lifelines. Consequently, targeted communication strategies through these channels, particularly Facebook, can enhance the dissemination of vital information and support services to migrant populations (Cassar, Gauci, Bacchi, 2016).

The representation of destination countries on social media and migration trends

The representation of destination countries on social media is often exaggerated, and this inflated portrayal can significantly influence people's perceptions and decisions about migration (Castelli, 2018). For example, social media posts frequently highlight the best aspects of life in affluent countries, such as economic opportunities, high living standards, and picturesque landscapes, which can create a skewed image of these destinations. This can lead potential migrants to develop unrealistic expectations and overlook potential challenges like cultural adjustments or employment barriers. Moreover, diasporic links facilitated by social media act as additional attractors, creating a network effect where individuals are more inclined to migrate to countries where they have social connections or support systems (Castelli, 2018). These links can provide firsthand accounts and practical advice about the migration process, further reinforcing the appeal of these destinations. Additionally, social media plays a crucial role in raising awareness of living conditions in affluent nations (Castelli, 2018). By showcasing various aspects of daily life, healthcare, education, and employment opportunities, social media can serve as a powerful tool in shaping the aspirations and plans of potential migrants. The portrayal of destination countries on social media may also contribute to the abandonment of stereotypes regarding the typical migrant, highlighting the diverse motivations behind individual migration decisions (Castelli, 2018). This broader representation can lead to a more nuanced understanding of migration trends, recognizing the varied and complex factors that drive individuals to relocate. Therefore, the exaggerated and often idealized representation of destination countries on social media not only affects the perceptions and expectations of potential migrants but also influences broader migration trends and patterns.

Social media and migration information

The role of social media in influencing the accessibility of migration information is multifaceted, intertwining various domains such as information asymmetry, connectivity, and real-time communication. One core aspect is how social media reduces information asymmetry, which traditionally hindered potential migrants from making well-informed decisions. By bridging the gap between intention and action, social media offers a platform where individuals can gather comprehensive data about destination countries, albeit often

more focused on opportunities rather than the risks involved during transit (Hidayati, 2018). Furthermore, social media's connectivity features significantly enhance migrants' access to essential networks. These networks provide valuable insights and firsthand experiences from other migrants, thereby lowering the threshold cost required to migrate (Hidayati, 2018). This interconnected web of user-generated content and interactive features allows would-be migrants to ask questions and receive immediate feedback, which can demystify various aspects of the migration process and align their expectations with reality (Obi, Bartolini and D'Haese, 2020). However, it is crucial to recognize that the type and completeness of information available on social media can significantly alter migration intentions, as incomplete or biased information can lead to misguided decisions (Hidayati, 2018). Therefore, while social media serves as a powerful tool for enhancing the accessibility of migration information, it also necessitates careful navigation and critical evaluation of the information presented. This calls for interventions that promote accurate and comprehensive information dissemination on these platforms, ensuring that potential migrants are equipped with reliable knowledge to make informed decisions.

Social media platforms used for sharing migration-related content

The landscape of social media platforms for sharing migration-related content is diverse, with each platform serving distinct user demographics and usage patterns. Facebook emerges as the preeminent platform for sharing migration-related information, particularly among migrants in Malta, due to its widespread popularity and user-friendly interface (Cassar, Gauci and Bacchi, 2016). It allows migrants to connect with family and friends while simultaneously providing a channel for accessing vital information on migration laws and rights, which many migrants express a keen interest in receiving (Cassar, Gauci and Bacchi, 2016). This dual functionality makes Facebook an effective medium for organizations aiming to disseminate migration-related content and engage with the migrant community (Cassar, Gauci and Bacchi, 2016). Meanwhile, platforms such as Twitter and LinkedIn attract a different audience, with a notable gender distinction where women are more likely to use these platforms than men (Cassar, Gauci and Bacchi, 2016). However, their overall usage for migration-related content remains limited compared to Facebook (Cassar, Gauci and Bacchi, 2016). To maximize outreach, organizations should consider a strategic mix of targeted information and entertaining content to engage migrants more effectively and ensure that crucial information reaches a broader audience (Cassar, Gauci and Bacchi, 2016). Understanding these nuanced patterns helps tailor communication strategies to the preferences and behaviors of migrant users, ensuring that critical information is both accessible and engaging.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between social media and migration is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that warrants further exploration within both academic and policy

frameworks. The historical context of migration trends, coupled with the advent of social media platforms, has significantly reshaped how individuals navigate their migration journeys. Theoretical perspectives, such as network theory and the push-pull model, provide valuable lenses through which to understand the dynamics of social capital and communication in migration contexts. Empirical evidence from case studies underscores the transformative role social media plays in influencing migration flows and decision-making processes among various migrant communities. As this literature review illustrates, social media not only serves as a tool for connection and information dissemination but also plays a critical role in shaping the experiences of migrants. Future research should continue to delve into these themes, exploring the implications of social media on migration patterns and the lived experiences of migrants in an increasingly digital world.

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