

## **Digital diaspora: Exploring the social networking dynamics of international students in Chandigarh, India**

Pankaj Dhiman  
*Chandigarh University, India*

Vasileios Paliktzoglou  
*Bahrain Polytechnic, Bahrain*

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In this paper, we examined the relationship between social networking sites (SNSs) and the coping strategies international students adopt amidst cultural shocks in India, particularly in the vibrant locale of Chandigarh. The study scrutinizes pivotal factors that influence international students' SNS use and creates and validates an instrument that measures this relationship. Grounded in the uses and gratifications theory (UGT), this research introduces an instrument—the Social Capital Assessment Scale and Inventory (SCASI), which was developed via exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The research concludes that SNSs play a pivotal role in the globalization of information, encompassing education, knowledge dissemination, interactivity, and cultural exchange in geographically diverse countries such as India.*

**Keywords:** cross-cultural communication, digital diaspora, international students, SNS

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The internationalization of education has led to an increasing number of students from different countries seeking higher education opportunities worldwide (Zdemir, 2022). Today, students have many prospects for furthering their personal development, which are not restricted to their home country's higher education but

to the entire world. Research has shown that moving abroad and assimilating into a new nation requires much effort (Sin & Kim, 2013). Apart from the critical responsibility of making new relationships and maintaining those that already exist, students traveling for a short period also need to learn a significant amount about their new physical and social environments (Sin & Kim, 2013).

International students studying abroad may benefit from using new technologies to maintain contact with friends and family back home and to establish new relationships with locals. Home and host SNSs and online ethnic social networks are examples of these technologies (Lin et al., 2012; Park et al., 2014; Park & Noh, 2018). The rise in popularity of SNSs has given international students many options to connect with friends and family back home and meet new people in the host community (Hofhuis et al., 2023). SNSs can improve interpersonal relationships and general well-being by creating new options for relationship maintenance and bolstering existing ones (Baines et al., 2022). Furthermore, social media connections can help people overcome challenges and adjust to new situations, especially when moving to a new country, culture, or environment (Baines et al., 2022).

SNSs facilitate communication and connections between users and allow users to maintain online and offline friendships (Ifinedo, 2016; Sin & Kim, 2013). Users can access SNSs for knowledge sharing, connectivity, and interactivity (Baines et al., 2022; Paliktzoglou et al., 2021). Using SNSs to build relationships provides students with a communication platform that helps them deal with challenging circumstances (Baines et al., 2022; Wong & Liu, 2024).

At Panjab University and its affiliated colleges in Chandigarh, approximately 400 international students have been pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate courses. International students demonstrate resilience despite limited interaction with the indigenous population and successfully negotiate the challenges of cross-cultural experiences. There are many possible difficulties when studying abroad, and international students may struggle with stress and adjustment issues (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). According to Murray and Kennedy-Lightsey (2013), students face pressure to succeed in the academic and social domains, and their integration plays a vital role.

International students enrolled in universities outside their home countries face additional potential sources of stress and difficulties that young adults frequently encounter during their college years (Lin et al., 2012; Park et al., 2014; Sherry et al., 2010). These include intersectional and academic difficulties, discrimination, social isolation, and systemic barriers (Soong & Maheepala, 2023). Language proficiency issues, new social and cultural norms, financial stress, educational challenges, loneliness, discrimination, and practical issues related to shifting environments are some common issues that international students face (Gautam et al., 2016; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Additional difficulties international students face includes not knowing the social mores of the new nation, homesickness, and anxiety (Pang, 2018; Ward et al., 2001).

This study aims to investigate diverse types of gratification via SNSs to address their needs and challenges in a new cultural environment through the lens of the uses and gratification theory (UGT), which postulates that, to address these burdens, international students look for support, social interaction, and information (Pang, 2018; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). More specifically, the study's objective is to explore the factors that influence international students' use of SNSs and to create and validate an instrument that measures this relationship. Hence, the study explores the following research question:

What are the key factors influencing international students' utilization of SNSs in navigating their academic and social integration, managing time, sustaining emotional well-being, fostering cross-cultural communication, and forming identities within a new cultural environment?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Uses and Gratification Theory in Understanding SNS Use among International Students**

The theory known as the uses and gratifications theory (UGT) presents a comprehensive explanation of the reasons and methods by which individuals actively select particular media platforms to fulfill their specific requirements (Katz et al., 1973). In theory, users will remain engaged with SNSs if their needs and wants are adequately met through these tools (Ku et al., 2013).

The utilization of SNSs by international students encompasses a wide range of intentions, such as information acquisition, communication, social interaction, amusement, and the pursuit of status (Saeed & Ullah, 2021). Through SNSs, international students actively pursue a variety of types of gratification, including self-expression, entertainment, relationship maintenance, and information acquisition (Eger et al., 2020). Interestingly, SNSs positively impact their lives and help them succeed academically (Muyingo, 2017; Paliktzoglou et al., 2021). Social influence and interaction promote bonding and bridge social capital and drive SNS usage (Raji et al., 2020).

According to Ahmed and Zia (2022), the UGT offers a framework for comprehending the particular needs and satisfactions sought and explains the motivations behind international students' use of SNSs. For example, international students studying in Turkey use platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Google Group for various reasons, such as learning outside the classroom, socializing with classmates, and honing language skills (Muyingo, 2017). These platforms offer gratifications such as educational video viewing, instant messaging, and academic information sharing. Furthermore, research reveals that social media use motivations include meeting new people, expressing a more popular self, passing time, and entertainment (Kircaburun et al., 2020). The UGT provides a strong foundation for understanding the complex dynamics of international students' use of SNSs. It reveals the desires, needs, and

motivations behind their use of social media, offering a sophisticated view of how this group uses and navigates different SNSs to achieve a range of goals.

### **Social Capital and Information among International Students on SNSs**

According to Filipovic and Arslanagic-Kalajdzic (2023), SNSs significantly impact the development of social capital among students. SNSs serve as essential platforms for social interaction, information sharing, and the development of virtual relationships that can lead to offline bonding and bridging. Active participation on these platforms enables communication with peers from the home country and local communities, which in turn promotes a feeling of community and allows for the mutual sharing of resources, knowledge, and assistance (Filipovic & Arslanagic-Kalajdzic, 2023; Mushtaq et al., 2022).

International students actively use SNSs to gather information about their new nation's educational and cultural environment and provide a strategic mechanism for cultural integration through the purposeful pursuit of profiles linked to local news channels and culture, which enhances their understanding of local issues (Lin et al., 2012; Pang, 2020).

Despite the plethora of social capital and information exchange opportunities offered by SNSs, recognizing challenges, such as the complexities of time management and privacy concerns, is essential. Navigating the dynamic environment of these platforms requires a balance between social interaction and academic obligations (Mushtaq et al., 2022; Pang, 2018). This dynamic strengthens international networks, promotes cross-cultural understanding, and allows for the reciprocal exchange of experiences (Lin et al., 2012; Pang, 2020).

### **Academic and Social Integration through SNSs**

Research suggests that international students use SNSs as powerful tools for their academic work, not just as informal social networks do. In this situation, these online forums serve as channels for interacting with classmates, encouraging group projects, exchanging scholarly materials, and having lively class discussions (Paliktzoglou et al., 2021). SNS transform education by creating virtual spaces for academic discourse and interaction outside traditional classrooms (Resch & Amorim, 2021; Sleeman et al., 2020).

The flourishing of knowledge exchange, study tips, and mutual academic support within SNSs highlights the transformative potential of facilitating peer learning (Paliktzoglou et al., 2021). This phenomenon emphasizes the flexible and collaborative nature of SNSs in the academic landscape and takes on additional significance when considering the diverse cultural tapestry common in student cohorts (Chang et al., 2022; Ngai et al., 2020).

SNS platforms serve as channels for promoting cooperative projects, interdisciplinary dialogs, and the sharing of various viewpoints. SNSs significantly enhance the quality of the academic experience by bridging cultural divides and valuing diversity as a strength rather than a weakness (Pallas et al., 2019). As

international students create social networks on the basis of shared academic interests, there is a noticeable convergence of educational and social integration on SNSs (Paliktzoglou et al., 2021). These relationships extend well beyond the classroom and play a significant role in developing a strong sense of community, emotional stability, and a robust support system. In this interconnected ecosystem, SNSs play a multifaceted role as facilitators of social and academic integration (Ngai et al., 2020; Sleeman et al., 2020).

The literature highlights the attendant challenges and the numerous opportunities that SNSs present for social integration and academic success. These include the possibility of being distracted, information overload, educational integrity issues, and privacy issues (Paliktzoglou et al., 2021). Maintaining a balance between social engagement and academic pursuits becomes crucial, requiring a sophisticated comprehension of the changing dynamics of SNS use among international students (Chang et al., 2022; Pang, 2018).

### **Time Management and Well-being in Social Networking Site Use**

The symbiotic relationship between time management, well-being, and the ubiquitous use of SNSs emerges as a focal point for scholarly investigation within the landscape of experiences of international students (Murari et al, 2024; Oginda, 2024)). The intricate relationship between time management and social media usage patterns permeates every aspect of students' daily lives, impacting their academic obligations and social interactions and ultimately shaping their overall experience (Er et al., 2018; Pang, 2018). The delicate balance necessary for efficient time management emerges as a significant theme that impacts these students' academic paths (Guo et al., 2014; Hall & Sivakumaran, 2014).

The literature highlights the importance of SNSs as crucial coping strategies for international students, given their complex nature. These digital platforms function as emotional support channels, providing comfort in overcoming the challenges of anxiety and homesickness that frequently accompany travel (Pang, 2018). International students face difficulty managing their time effectively because SNSs are captivating yet time-consuming. The possibility of distractions and the need for solid self-control are essential elements influencing students' social and academic lives (Er et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2014). Given the usefulness of SNSs in international students' daily lives, with time commitment, SNSs fit easily with students' everyday schedules, acting as facilitators of communication, learning, and convenience in general (Hall & Sivakumaran, 2014).

### **Communication and Identity in SNS Use**

Academic research is now centered on the ubiquitous impact of SNSs on international students' communication and identity formation. These platforms offer a practical and easily accessible way to maintain relationships with friends, family, and peers while overcoming time and distance barriers (Binsahl et al.,

2015). SNS continuity and adaptability to different time zones promote an international communication environment that fits the needs of today's international students (Brooks & Pitts, 2016; Reinhardt & Chen, 2013).

SNSs are proactive in helping international students develop their sense of self. Students use these platforms as expressive tools to shape their digital selves, reflecting cultural, intellectual, and personal aspects of their identities through profile creation, content sharing, and participation in online communities (Gomes & Tran, 2017; Pang, 2018). These platforms turn into forums for exchanging viewpoints, experiences, and cultural quirks, which promotes inclusivity and a feeling of community among the world's learners (Binsahl et al., 2015; Gomes & Tran, 2017).

Although SNSs present unparalleled communication opportunities, obstacles such as misinterpretations, cultural misapprehensions, and the possibility of excessive information are recognized. Effective cross-cultural communication on these platforms requires navigating these obstacles, highlighting the importance of digital literacy and intercultural competence (Brooks & Pitts, 2016; Chang et al., 2022). The above literature review provided a theoretical framework for the study aimed at investigating the factors that influence international students' use of SNSs.

## METHOD

For this research, the convenience sampling method, which is a nonprobability sampling technique, has been employed, wherein groups of people are chosen on the basis of their ease of selection (Bryman, 2016). Small-scale convenience sampling is the most common method used in exploratory research to determine the range of response variability (Denscombe, 2017; Pham et al., 2021). The data obtained from the quantitative survey helped identify the role of SNSs in the lives of international students from different angles and from different aspects (Green et al., 2015). Quantitative data can be used to explore, show, describe, and better understand a phenomenon (Kim et al., 2011; Saunders et al., 2009). Another advantage of this approach is that quantitative data can be easily generalized (Bryman, 2016).

### Participants

The participants of the research are international students studying at different universities/departments/colleges in Chandigarh. Because permission was obtained from all the concerned institutions and individuals, the necessary data were collected. Out of 221 international students from the 2020–21 to 2021–22 academic years in Chandigarh, 180 international students participated in the survey. The response rate for the survey was 81.45%, which creates a more substantial claim in generalizing results from the sample to the population (Creswell, 2012).

## Data collection

An instrument, the SCASI, was developed on the basis of a literature review and consists of 27 questions. In the first part of the instrument, the demographic information of the participants was collected. In addition, in the second part of the survey, the instrument's items (17 questions) sought information on how international students in Chandigarh utilize SNSs to enrich their social capital and achieve academic and social integration. For this part of the survey, a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5) was adopted.

## Data analysis

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is used to extract the factors influencing international students' use of social networking sites (Hair et al., 2010). Moreover, EFA is employed because it is the most frequently used statistical technique in scale validation (Karami, 2015). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is used to validate the instrument, as it is a valuable tool for evaluating score validity (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2020; Stapleton, 1997).

The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin test is performed to measure the sampling adequacy and to study how the data are suited for factor analysis, with  $0.70 \leq KMO < 0.80$  values considered acceptable (Shrestha, 2021). Bartlett's test of sphericity is performed to ascertain the correlation matrix. A significant statistical test ( $> 0.05$ ) indicates that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix (Tobias & Carlson, 1969). Cronbach's alpha coefficient verified the instrument's reliability, with a recommended cutoff value of .70 (Hair et al., 2010).

Furthermore, the sample data were split to perform multivariate analysis (Schumacker & Lomax, 2010), i.e., first, the data obtained from 52 respondents were used to perform EFA, with  $n = 50$  as a reasonable absolute minimum for performing EFA (de Winter et al., 2009). After that, the data from the 128 respondents were used to perform CFA, with  $n > 100$  being the minimum for performing CFA (Anderson & Gerbing, 1984).

## RESULTS

The study examines the transformative role of SNSs in academic and social integration; the complex relationships among use, time management, and emotional well-being; and the contribution of SNSs to cross-cultural communication and the formation of identities. Using the first data set, EFA extracts the factors influencing international students' use of social networking sites. CFA is used to statistically test the factors discovered via EFA via the second data set and to validate the SCASI.

## Exploratory Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis

Prior to conducting the EFA, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test for sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity were employed to measure the factorability of the data. The KMO test for sampling adequacy was .810, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at .0001, indicating that the data are suitable for EFA, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: KMO and Bartlett's tests of sphericity**

KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.810
	Chi-Square	863.747
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Df	91
	Sig.	.0001

Principal component analysis as an extraction method with varimax rotation was performed to extract the factors, reducing many items into a smaller number of factors via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Kaiser criteria were considered for factor extraction, where only the factors with eigenvalues greater than one were taken for interpretation (Kaiser, 1974). EFA revealed that four factors were extracted, explaining 74.608% of the total variance, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Total Variance Explained**

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %age	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %age	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %age
1	4.040	28.857	28.857	4.040	28.857	28.857	3.501	25.006	25.006
2	3.289	23.492	52.349	3.289	23.492	52.349	2.971	21.219	46.225
3	1.606	11.473	63.822	1.606	11.473	63.822	2.272	16.231	62.456
4	1.510	10.786	74.608	1.510	10.786	74.608	1.701	12.152	74.608
5	.688	4.918	79.526						

6	.615	4.391	83.917
7	.428	3.060	86.976
8	.417	2.981	89.957
9	.325	2.320	92.277
10	.266	1.897	94.174
11	.253	1.810	95.984
12	.230	1.640	97.624
13	.196	1.399	99.023
14	.137	.977	100.000

Items 6, 7, and 9, which have low communalities (below 0.50), are not used for further analyses (Hair et al., 2010). The factor loadings of the remaining items ranged from .744--0.893 and were above the lower cutoff value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). The first factor, social capital and information, was named on the basis of the nature of the items and included 5 items explaining 28.857% of the total variance. The second factor, academic and social integration, includes 4 items explaining 23.492% of the total variance. The third factor, time management and well-being, includes 3 items explaining 11.473% of the total variance. The fourth factor, communication and identity, includes 2 items explaining 10.786% of the total variance, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis on the 14 Items**

Factors	Items	Factor loadings
Factor A: Social capital and information	Q3. Do you agree that following or adding profiles of Indian counterparts on social networking sites helps you generate social capital?	.881
	Q4. Do you agree that by following social pages on your social networking sites that are of Indian culture helps you understand local culture better?	.871
	Q14. Do you agree that by following regional or national news channel pages on your social networking accounts helps you connect with local issues?	.832
	Q16. Do you agree that it is appropriate follow social networking sites pages of the Indian government?	.815

	Q15. Do you agree that it is appropriate following social networking sites pages of political parties?	.751
Factor B: Academic and social integration	Q5. Do you agree that social networking sites are important from your studies point of view?	.867
	Q10. Do you agree that social networking sites are important to help you to understand multiple cultures?	.744
	Q11. Do you agree that social networking sites serve a better platform for interaction with locals and making good bonds?	.850
	Q17. Do you agree that social networking sites are time-consuming but important helping you a lot in daily life?	.846
Factor C: Time management and well- being	Q2. Do you agree that you spend a considerable amount of time on social networking sites daily?	.858
	Q12. Do you agree that academic learning becomes easier with the usage of social networking sites?	.856
	Q13. Do you agree that social networking sites help to deal with anxiety and homesickness?	.783
Factor D: Communicati on and identity	Q1. Do you agree that having a profile on social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, etc., is beneficial?	.893
	Q8. Do you agree that social networking sites are better medium of communication than face-to-face communication?	.870

Cronbach's alpha coefficient has been applied to test the instrument's reliability by examining whether a set of items consistently measures the same factor. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranged from .757--0.891, indicating that the internal consistency of the data is acceptable, exceeding the recommended value of 0.70, as shown in Table 4.

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

CFA is used to test the validity of the discovered EFA factors via the second data set. More specifically, CFA is conducted to test the convergent and discriminant validity via SPSS Amos software. Before testing the validity, goodness-of-fit indices are examined to evaluate whether the distribution's quality fits the data. Table 5 shows the findings and their recommended cutoff values (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

**Table 4: Instrument reliability via Cronbach's alpha coefficient**

Factor	No of Items	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
Factor A: Social capital and information	5	.891
Factor B: Academic and social integration	4	.868
Factor C: Time management and well-being	3	.801
Factor D: Communication and identity	2	.757

**Table 5: Goodness-of-fit indices**

Goodness-of-fit index	Recommended value	cutoff	Result
CMIN/DF	<3		1.171
p value	>.05		0.153
CFI	>.95		0.985
AGFI	>.80		0.877
RMSEA	<.05		0.037
PCLOSE	>.05		0.743

Convergent validity is the internal consistency of the items measuring the same factor. It is checked by observing the factor loadings, the average variance extracted (AVE) of the factors, and the composite reliability (CR) (Cheung et al., 2023; Hair et al., 2010). The recommended standardized factor loadings are 0.5 or greater, the AVE values are 0.5 or greater, and the CR values are 0.7 or greater (Hair et al., 2010). All the items have significant loadings onto the respective factors, with values varying between .621 and .930, AVE values ranging from .587 to .709, and CR values ranging from .813 to .875, as shown in Table 6.

In terms of discriminant validity, items should correlate better with each other than with other items from different factors. The square root of each AVE value that belongs to a factor can be used to test for discriminant validity because it is significantly larger than any correlation between any two factors (Hair et al., 2010). According to the findings shown in Table 7, all the factors achieved discriminant validity.

**Table 6: Standardized loading, average variance extracted and composite reliability**

Factor	Item	Standardized loading	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Composite reliability (CR)
Factor A: Social capital and information	Q3	.621	.587	.875
	Q4	.773		
	Q14	.685		
	Q15	.872		
	Q16	.848		
Factor B: Academic and social integration	Q5	.654	.610	.861
	Q10	.803		
	Q11	.810		
	Q17	.843		
Factor C: Time management and well-being	Q2	.779	.593	.813
	Q12	.842		
	Q13	.680		
Factor D: Communication and identity	Q1	.744	.709	.828
	Q8	.930		

**Table 7. Discriminant validity**

	Factor A: Social capital and information	Factor B: Academic and social integration	Factor C: Time management and well-being	Factor D: Communication and identity
Factor A: Social capital and information	<b>0.766</b>			
Factor B: Academic and social integration	0.334	<b>0.781</b>		
Factor C: Time management and well-being	0.254	0.375	<b>0.770</b>	
Factor D: Communication and identity	0.165	0.496	0.406	<b>0.842</b>

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to create and validate an instrument to investigate the factors influencing international students' use of social networking sites to address their needs and challenges in a new cultural milieu. The empirical findings of this study are combined with the theoretical underpinnings provided by the UGT. The development of an instrument using EFA and CFA has significantly enhanced the understanding of international students' use of SNSs.

SCASI reliability and validity assessments highlight its robustness, defining four factors: social capital and information, academic and social integration, time management and well-being, and communication and identity. EFA revealed a comprehensive factor structure, with four factors explaining 74.608% of the total variance. This finding aligns with previous research and provides insight into the multifaceted nature of international students' SNS usage.

The internal consistency of each factor was carefully examined in terms of reliability via Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Factor A, social capital and information, demonstrated high reliability ( $\alpha = .891$ ), emphasizing the consistency in how international students use SNSs for social connections and information access. Factor B, Academic and Social Integration, demonstrated reliable internal consistency ( $\alpha = .868$ ), indicating that social networking sites play a dual role in fostering academic collaboration and social integration. Likewise, Factor C, time management and well-being, demonstrated acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .801$ ), highlighting the challenges posed by SNSs' time-consuming nature to students' overall well-being. Factor D, communication and identity, demonstrated acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .757$ ), emphasizing the role of SNSs in shaping communication patterns and identity among international students.

Moreover, the CFA validates the factor structure even further, confirming the stability and reliability of the identified factors. According to the CFA results, the model fit is statistically acceptable, and all the factors have convergent and discriminant validity. This indicates that the final scale has the necessary psychometric properties, providing credibility to the study's findings.

Social capital and information, the first identified factor, resonates with the UGT, demonstrating how international students actively seek gratifications such as self-expression, entertainment, and information acquisition via SNSs (Filipovic & Arslanagic-Kalajdzic, 2023; Saeed & Ullah, 2021). Statistical analyses revealed significant factor loadings for items within this factor, confirming the importance of SNSs in fostering connections and increasing cultural awareness. This factor's high reliability underscores its importance in understanding how international students use SNSs for social and informational purposes. Furthermore, insights into specific activities, such as following counterparts on social networking sites and engaging with local news channels, provide a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of social capital and information exchange via SNSs, enriching the literature.

Academic and social integration reflect the empirical findings of the second identified factor, emphasizing the transformative potential of SNSs in facilitating academic discourse and interaction among international students (Resch & Amorim, 2021; Sleeman et al., 2020). The second factor, academic and social integration, is consistent with the literature's recognition of SNSs as critical for promoting cross-cultural cooperation and improving the quality of the academic experience (Pallas et al., 2019). A statistical examination of the second factor reveals the importance of academic collaboration and social interaction in the context of SNSs. The underlined tasks, including understanding multiple cultures, provide significant insight into how international students use SNSs for academic purposes and holistic integration into their host community's social landscape. Hence, these findings expand our understanding of the transformative potential of SNSs.

The discussion of time management and well-being delves into the complex relationships among time management, social media usage patterns, and international students' overall well-being (Er et al., 2018; Pang, 2018). The third factor, time management and well-being, provides statistical evidence of the delicate balance that international students must strike to manage their time effectively. A more in-depth statistical analysis of the third factor reveals the dynamics of time management and well-being in relation to SNS use. The findings provide insight into the complex relationships among time management, emotional well-being, and the widespread use of SNSs among international students. Specific activities, such as using SNSs to address anxiety and homesickness, provide unexpected insights into international students' coping mechanisms. This discovery adds to the body of knowledge by delving into the emotional and psychological aspects of well-being.

Communication and identity investigate how SNSs aid in cross-cultural communication and identity formation (Binsahl et al., 2015; Gomes & Tran, 2017). This reveals the statistics of the fourth factor, communication and identity, within the realm of SNSs. Items such as having a social networking profile and believing that these platforms are a better communication medium than face-to-face interactions have high factor loadings, indicating a statistically solid relationship with the overarching construct.

## LIMITATIONS

In addition to the valuable insights gained, it is critical to recognize certain limitations of the study. The study's cross-sectional design limits the investigation of the dynamic nature of SNS usage over time. Rather, longitudinal studies can provide a complete picture of how these usage patterns change. Furthermore, the study concentrates on international students in Chandigarh, limiting the generalisability of findings with respect to other geographical or cultural contexts.

The study also relies on self-reported data, which raises the possibility of social desirability bias.

Future research should aim to diversify the sample by considering different demographics and cultural backgrounds. Using mixed-methods approaches, such as qualitative interviews, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of SNS usage among international students.

## CONCLUSION

The study focused on international students and revealed that SNSs are the preferred communication medium because of their ease of use. The majority of the international students considered in the study were primarily on SNSs for their interpersonal interactions, as they find themselves to be more extroverted on SNSs. This finding aligns with previous research and provides insight into the multifaceted nature of international students' SNS usage. Grounded in the UGT, the study employs a meticulously developed instrument—SCASI, refined through both EFA and CFA—to unravel the multifaceted relationship between international students and SNSs. Through the lens of the identified factors—namely, social capital and information, academic and social integration, time management and well-being, and communication and identity—the study provides a nuanced understanding of how SNSs influence various dimensions of international students' lives.

The first factor, social capital and information, underscores the pivotal role of SNSs in facilitating international students in generating social capital and exchanging information. Similarly, the second factor—academic and social integration—highlights the importance of academic collaboration and multiple cultures. The third factor—time management and well-being—becomes significant as the use of SNSs to address anxiety and homesickness provides unexpected insights into international students' coping mechanisms. Finally, the fourth factor—communication and identity—indicates that SNSs are a better communication medium for self-expression, identity negotiation and cross-cultural communication. Thus, international students' sense of self and cultural identity should be shaped.

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**PANKAJ DHIMAN, PhD**, is a senior journalist-turned-academician with an over a decade of rich background in journalism, media and public policy. His major interests matched with the social media communities, media education and journalism. Email: [pankaj.e14157@cumail.in](mailto:pankaj.e14157@cumail.in)

**VASILEIOS PALIKTZOGLU, PhD**, is a distinguished academic and industry expert in computer science from the University of Eastern Finland. His research primarily centers on social computing and collaborative learning, and he actively engages in international research collaborations. Email: [paliktzoglou@gmail.com](mailto:paliktzoglou@gmail.com)

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