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Narratives of integration: Liminality in migrant acculturation through social media

Abstract:

Migrant integration is a long drawn out process requiring synergies with various dimensions of life, rhyming with those of the host country. In this paper, we attempt to deconstruct the digital narratives of migrant to explore how they may lead to a meaningful assessment of their acculturation and consequent integration in their host societies'. Drawing on acculturation theory as a lens, we argue that migrants' use of social media creates a liminality that is synonymous to ambiguity and disorientation that may diminish through a composite adaptation of acculturation and ethnic identity. Our data evidence on social media use among migrants domiciled in major cities in Sweden suggest that social media-based interaction of migrants is not encouraging integration, while their digital proclivities tend to define their narratives of online ethnicity and their physical realities. Implications for migrant integration are presented.

Keywords: acculturation, social media, migrant, ethnic identity, user generated content, community

Some claim the world is gradually becoming united, that it will grow into a brotherly community as distances shrink and ideas are transmitted through the air. Alas, you must not believe that men can be united in this way.

-Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880)

1. Introduction

Migrant integration, a process by which migrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups (IOM, 2011), has come to dominate both on and offline contemporary discourse on migration. While many host populations remain sanguine about immigration in general, one of the

debates shaping this discourse tends to focus on migrant civic engagement, integration, and their assimilation in their host communities (Alam and Imran, 2015; Veronis et al., 2018). Recent rise in talks on social media about migrants (not) taking on their host countries “values” (Sandelind, 2014; Nekby, 2010), suggest that migrant integration has not only become problematic in many places. It remains a challenge to welcoming new arrivals, boosting the rights of migrants, and improving their labour market participation. At a time when more people use social media to communicate, make friends, and become part of communities, it is possible that migrants as active social media users (Lim and Pham, 2016) are participants in the burgeoning online ‘acculturation-integration’ discourse. Yet, we know little about how migrants experience, interpret, and affect online discussions related to their acculturation and integration in practice. In other words, to what extent does social media use among migrants aid their acculturation and integration in their host societies? We argue that understanding the digital ethnicity apparent among the social media narratives of migrants could extend our understanding of migrants’ interpretations of their potential trajectories, integrative-acculturative or otherwise.

Our objective in this study, therefore, is to examine migrants’ access to virtual communities, the type of content they generate, and the nature of derived identity among migrants as a result of social media use. We approach our study through the retrospective narratives of Sweden domiciled migrants across several cities including Stockholm, Jönköping, Malmö, and Gothenburg. Reflecting the digital proclivities of these migrants, we found that social media-based interaction of migrants is not only encouraging the opposite effects of isolation, and consequent ghettoization, and their digital proclivities tend to define their narratives of online ethnicity and their physical realities. Our study therefore makes two contributions. First, in highlighting social media as a central platform through which a variety of aspirations of cultural exchange and mutual appreciation could be perceived, we add to the acculturation and integration literature by showing how social media in everyday use creates liminal spaces in which discourse on migrant acculturation and integration come to be labelled. Second, in deconstructing migrants’ digital narratives on their lived experiences, our study sheds light on the

extent to which migrant social media activities facilitates acculturation, we provide insights into the virtual strategies employed by migrants to aid their integration in their host societies’.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: First, we review the extant literature on social media use by migrants that may influence their integration and acculturation into host societies. Following this is our research methodology. Next is the data analysis and research findings, after which we conclude the paper with a discussion of our findings and the implications of our research for the theory and practice of migrant social media use and its pervasive influence on their integration in their host societies.

2. Migrants’ integration, acculturation and social media

The International Organization on migration has called on pluralistic societies’ to address the needs and capacities of migrants as well as those of receiving communities because migrant integration is long drawn out process that requires a continuous decrease in the differences between migrants and host populations access to such as employment, education, health and social inclusion(IOM, 2011). In this regard, the existing literature has extended our understanding of the historical, political, and social context within which migrant integration is frequently labelled and judged in pluralistic societies (see for example: Oudenhoven and Ward, 2012; Samnani et al., 2013; Barker, 2105; Maly, 2016; Kersting, 2018). The fundamental assumption driving this stream of work is that well integrated migrants are likely to be good citizens who contribute meaningfully to their communities and societies’ at large (Sarpong et al., 2018; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993). Cumulatively, these studies conceptualise cultural adaptation on the part of migrants as necessary for successful integration (Kraal, et al., 2004). In addition, previous research on migrant integration share an emphasis on giving ontological priority to the ‘physical world’ or what has come to be known as the offline world as the fundamental context or space within which migrant integration occur.

Scholars have recently emphasised that, although the offline context predominantly gives form to migrant integration, recent advances in technology and the subsequent proliferation of social media

outlets provide novel spaces wherein migrant integration or otherwise gets shaped and played out across space and time. Emerging studies on how cyberspaces, and in particular, social media enable or impede migrant integration has resulted in three contested outcomes in assessing migrant integration. The first is what has come to be known as 'virtual communities' or 'digital togetherness' (Marino, 2015). Thus, some scholars point to social media use among migrants as a catalyst to their isolation and ghettoization in their host countries (Elias and Lemish, 2008; Bacigalupe and Cámara, 2012). For Croucher and Rahmani (2015), the increasing use of social media outlets like Facebook which fosters virtual migrant communities or among migrants encourage them to reject rather than embrace the prevalent dominant culture in which they reside. At the extreme end of the continuum, Schumann, van der Linden, and Klein (2012) found that social media use among migrants can potentially help to reduce their own prejudices and improve their mutual acceptance of 'others'. For Lim and Pham (2016) migrants extensively use social media to create their individual friends' circle that support their acculturation and eventual integration.

The second contested outcome in assessing integration is related to online identity, belongingness, or attachment to host countries. Frequently examined through the lens of heterotopias—spaces that exhibit dual meaning, migrant integration is conceptualised as a combination of hybrid identity of the host country and a 'utopia' of the country of origin (Davis, 2010). Yet, the extra territorial nature of social media in defining national identity and self-disclosure in the context of visual anonymity makes it impossible to unpack potential outlooks, signs, and symbols that necessarily punctuate the composition of a given national identity (Glukov, 2017; (Misoch, 2015). The third stream of literature evaluating migrant integration levels tend to focus on agency and ownership of content among social media users (Panagakos and Horst, 2006; Madianou and Miller, 2013). Examining unedited posts or shared user generated content among migrants of different persuasion (See for example, White and Abu-Rayya, 2012; Lissitsa, 2016), such studies which often rely on internet surveys hence tend to struggle in capturing the rich narratives behind the generated content.

At the other end of the continuum, acculturation theory as advanced by Lindon and Herskovits (1936) has been widely adopted as the starting point to theorizing migrants' integration (Samnani, Boekhorst and Harrison, 2013; Lu, Samaratunge and Härtel, 2012). In this regard, Berry (1997; p.149) citing Lindon and Herskovits (1936) as a point of departure, observes that acculturation takes place when "groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups". Berry (ibidem) goes further to identify marginalisation, separation, integration and assimilation, as potential outcomes of acculturation. These outcomes, Berry (ibidem) observes, vary depending on the extent to which migrants are connected to their country of residence and country of origin. *Marginalisation* occurs when migrants are not successful in establishing ties to the country of residence while looking for contacts with the country of origin. This predominantly occurs when migrants lose contacts with the country of origin due to the proximity and lack of local network in the country of residence (e.g. Evansluong, 2016). *Separation* takes place when migrants do not embrace the interactions with the host country while maintaining contacts and practice of the culture of their home country (Dey et al., 2017; Berry, 1997). This might be due to unsuccessful attempts to establish networks with local people in the country of residence, which leads to the feeling of being rejected. Such feeling makes migrants more attached to the country of residence or ethnic community in the country of residence where migrants can experience being accepted (e.g. Kim, 1999). *Integration* occurs when migrants wholeheartedly embrace the host country's culture and maintain connections with the home country (Berry, ibidem). This can be achieved when migrants feel accepted in the country of residence while feeling attached to the country of origin at the same time (e.g. Evansluong, 2016). Finally, *Assimilation* occurs when migrants no longer want to maintain connections with the country of origin and are completely absorbed into their country of residence.

Ontologically premised on physical interactions and 'face to face' connections between host and migrant populations, extensions of Berry's (1997) framework to studying acculturation has primarily remained a stable body of knowledge. Thus, migrants' use of the local language of their

country of residence versus their mother tongues (Kizgin et al, 2017; Høgmo, 1998; Valenta, 2008), their engagements with social activities in the country of residence (Bourhis, Montaruli, El-Geledi, Harvey and Barrette, 2010), and their feeling of belongingness to the country of residence versus their country of origin (Ward et al., 2010; Castles and Davidson, 2000) are some of the few proxies that have been employed to theorise migrants' acculturation. In this regard, we know little about acculturation through virtual platforms and online media as a whole. Yet, social media use has been identified as playing an important role in migrants' integration process, specifically on the degree of social engagement, sense of belongingness and connections to community and networks (e.g. Li and Tsai, 2015; Lim and Pham, 2016). In particular, studies exploring migrants' acculturation and integration via online technologies that provide spaces for virtual interactions with migrants' country of residence and country of origin remain sparse if not fragmented. The few existing studies tend to focus on the social media use of international students' and how they may contribute to their adaptation in the countries they study. For example, Chen and Hanasono's (2016) examined the acculturation effect on Chinese students' use of social media, and found their adaptation to American culture was positively associated with Facebook use, whereas the maintenance of their Chinese culture was positively related to the use of the Chinese social networking site called Renren. In a related development, Lim and Pham's (2016) found social media use by Indonesian and Vietnamese students in Singapore simultaneously facilitated their acculturation and allowed them to interact with their families and friends at home who offered support.

Beyond the platitudes of migrants using social media and its potential to enhance their well-being and acculturation, we ask: what specific types of activities do migrants engage in on social media, and how do such online engagements influence their acculturation in practice? In the next section, we present the research methodology guiding our empirical inquiry.

3. Research Methodology

The study reported in this paper advances insight into how migrant's social media use may contribute to their acculturation. We develop our contribution by drawing on migrants domiciled in Sweden. We

conducted our study in four major cities in Sweden (Stockholm, Jönköping, Malmö, and Gothenburg), whose high migrant population and cosmopolitan outlooks offered us a rich context to identify potential migrants who were likely to fit our theoretical sampling strategy. Owing to the paucity of research examining acculturation via social media, we adopted an exploratory qualitative research approach for our study. We relied on migrant related social networking groups on social media such as Facebook to identify potential participants. These groups ranged from Study Swedish groups, Expats groups, Integration groups, Red Cross, media (local newspapers) and organisations that assist migrants (e.g. MittLiv, JustArrived, Integremera). We developed three criteria to guide our selection of the participants included in the study. First, participants needed to be migrants to Sweden. Second, they should have lived in Sweden for at least a year, and finally, they needed to be active social media users and engaged in multiple virtual conversations. We individually invited as many as 200 potential participants to take part in the study. We then followed up with an electronic mail letter. In all 17 migrants made up of 9 males and 8 females who met our sampling criteria returned our emails and confirmed they would be available to take part in the study. Having diverse ethnic and occupational backgrounds, our participants included new arrived (1 to 3 years) and other who have lived up to 10 years in Sweden. Table 1 is a summary of the biographical information of our research participants.

Table 1: Biographical sketch of Research participants

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Years lived in Sweden	Gender	Country of origin	Occupation
1	Vicky	40-45	13	Female	Australia	IT consultant
2	Soumya	35-40	2	Male	Bangladesh	Unemployed
3	Bao	40-45	11	Male	Vietnam	Maths teacher
4	Quynh	25-30	3	Female	Vietnam	Student
5	Iva	35-40	11	Female	Romania	Civil servant
6	Quy	25-30	6	Female	Vietnam	Unemployed
7	Sara	30-35	3	Female	Syria	Employed by NGO
8	Adedayo	35-40	4	Male	Nigeria	TV Camera man

9	Liz	25-30	1	Female	U.S.A	Strategy manager
10	Mahdi	20-25	7	Male	Somalia	Teaching assistant
11	Ali	25-30	4	Male	Palestine	Job mentor
12	Huang	25-30	7	Female	China	Designer
13	Carlos	25-30	5	Male	Colombia	Marketer
14	Badih	25-30	4	Male	Afghanistan	Student
15	Azzat	25-30	3	Male	Afghanistan	Teaching Assistant
16	Abel	35-40	8	Male	Ethiopia	Research Student
17	Lara	25-30	1	Female	Switzerland	Student

Data for the study were collected through individual qualitative interviews. Each interview was conducted in English, recorded, and lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. We normally started with confidentiality assurances and followed up to collect biographical data of participants (Edirisingha et al., 2017). This was followed by us inviting them to tell us about their migration histories, their everyday online activities, and how their virtual conversations reflected their identities as migrants. We then drill down to explore how their online activities have shaped their identity as migrants and their feeling of belongingness in their host country. The recorded interviews were then transcribed and each interviewee was accorded a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.

Our data analysis followed three steps. First, we engaged in an open coding to make sure what our textual data did reflect what we heard in the field. Each researcher in our team read the transcripts of the interviews to analyse the texts with the goal of identifying recurrent phrases that permeated the narratives of our respondents' (Maxwell, 2004; Miles and Huberman, 1994). We then compared and discussed these texts together to reach and agree on some preliminary codes that were close as possible to the respondents' wordings in the transcripts (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Van Maanen, 1979). This resulted in first-order codes, namely, acquiring information on information sharing, identity

maintenance, political activism, group (de)achment, and solidarity. Second, we have interpreted the codes across all the respondents by moving back and forth between documents containing the texts selected from the transcripts and their relationship with the broad literature driving our inquiry (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). In the final step of our analysis, we subjected our second order themes to further iterative evaluation to filter through our chosen theoretical lens, and the broader literature on migrant social media use and acculturation. Further refinement led to the following three conceptual categories: Cultivating a sense of engagement, everyday Spatio-temporal interactions with ‘others’, and approval seeking and relational interdependencies, which we used to develop a viable interpretation of the online activities of our respondents and their influence on their acculturation in practice. Table 2 shows an overview of exemplar quotations. And the conceptual categories developed in probing our data.

Table 2 Overview of conceptual categories and exemplar quotations

Migrant social media use and acculturation	Exemplary quotations
<i>Cultivating a sense of engagement</i>	<p>‘I read Swedish newspaper in English on the internet to learn about local news’ [Soumya].</p> <p>‘I don’t know anything about Swedish news. Sometimes I read the news, but in it’s in Vietnamese newspaper, not in Swedish newspaper’ [Bao].</p> <p>‘I check how people write and translate [...] I’m not too much involved, it’s like politics [...] I don’t post or comments I only read the comments to know what they think about it, also for the language’ [Ali].</p> <p>‘I use FB to promote my political views (in my home country)’ [Abel].</p>
<i>Everyday spatio-temporal interactions with ‘other’</i>	<p>‘I’ve started to blog for a newspaper. That’s where I share my thoughts about what needs to be done in Swedish society in order to succeed within the integration process’ [Iva].</p> <p>‘I almost don’t use social media to interact with Swedes [...] I joined the Americans in Sweden group on Facebook when I moved here [...] because you’ve got to keep a little bit of your home culture feel [...] that helps to retain my feeling of being American [...] I missed a lot of social aspect like taking broader context from the US’ [Liz].</p>
<i>Approval seeking and relational interdependencies</i>	<p>‘I am an administrator of a Facebook group talking about big development going on in our residential areas [...] the local residents have been fighting against it discussing through a Facebook group so it’s Swedish speaking’ [Vicky].</p> <p>‘I use YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter [...] I actually have no problem with people sharing different opinions. When I put a post there, I know that there are people who want to challenge me and beat me up and people who want to tap me on the shoulder and say "Bravo!" [Adedayo].</p>

In the following section, we present the fine details of our research findings.

4. Research findings

4.1 Cultivating a sense of engagement

We found our migrants had a profound sense of engagement with their community and home countries. Our data evidence suggests that the level of their connectedness with their home and the host country through their social media activities had a direct influence on their everyday interactions with 'others'. This sense of engagement as played out in practice manifested in the form of being a passive receiver and actively expressing opinions. Our data shows that migrants remain as passive receivers to acquire information on social media if they seldom interact with the host society. For instance, Bao who reads newspapers and friends' updates on Facebook doesn't read any Swedish news, only Vietnamese ones. His interactions on Facebook are only with Vietnamese people. He says, he has some Swedish friends on Facebook, but he never really interacts with them. He has joined several Vietnamese groups but not any Swedish ones. Somewhat similar to Bao, Mahdi from Somalia uses Facebook to come up to speed with Somali news, or Swedish news as he doesn't have the time to sit and watch news programmes on TV.

I only use Facebook [...] I just read the newspaper [...] just Vietnamese news [...] and my friends' updates [...] I have some Swedish friends on Facebook but I never really interact with them [Bao].

In a similar situation, Soumya writes poems in Bengali and shares them with Indian and Bangladeshi Facebook participants. Soumya's interaction with mainly Indian and Bangladeshi Facebook participants again illustrates the actual chances of acculturation within Swedish host society. For him, he is treated like a 'stranger' in Sweden as the people are not keen to communicate with him. Consistent with prior studies, we found that migrants who spend excessive time on social media acquiring information of the home country have little incentive to establish both online and offline connections with the host country. In contrast to the passive information receivers, some of our respondents are actively expressing their opinions on social media through different activities by

sharing photos and news items, responding to conversation threads and or writing blogs on their interests. This group of participants interact with both contacts from Sweden and their home countries. One of our participants, Vicky who writes a blog on special needs of people with an ancillary objective of encouraging bloggers to come on board and start contributing. Vicky's blogs are mainly in English, about 80:20 would be the proportion ratio between English and Swedish. In addition to this, Vicky uses Facebook to share photos and news.

I use it for posting on photos, chatting with friends, group chatting, organizing things with friends. Another thing is discussions with the English-speaking mother groups [...] If it's a Swedish group, I would speak Swedish so if I'm talking to a Swedish speaker. [...] I find Swedes are different online. They seem to be more opinionated online than in real life' [Vicky].

As active as Vicky, Quynh mostly uses Facebook to interact with people and Instagram for sharing photos with a smaller group.

Instagram is a little bit more private, so I can share photos of my son – circulate a kind of a picture diary to a small group of people [Quynh].

Quynh also has a Twitter account but that she uses mainly to locate suitable work. Quynh adds that Facebook has really helped her a lot in getting to know people. Initially she found that having 'face to face conversations' were awkward as she had to repeat the same introduction every time she met someone for the first time. At worse, people simply refused to change into English mid conversation. To overcome her loneliness, she took to blogging:

Before my son was born I used to post material on politics, identity, culture and arts. Then after my son was born my postings were on life support issues like education and psychology. But recently it seems to me that there is no audience, so I don't post [Quynh].

She concedes she does not like to generate content and prefers to use such postings primarily for entertainment purposes, she's come to realise that writing in Vietnamese is counter-productive as people would not react to it, not even her fellow Vietnamese in Sweden. Writing in English, she claims also brings her foreign identity up, so writing in Swedish, she reckons, works best.' In a related development, Carlos from Colombia observes that the Swedish language is a key hurdle for his integration as he uses various online social media channels to interact with the Swedish population. For Iva, social media and her blog are the best means for her to send out information aimed at social

integration into Swedish society. While Iva conjectures that her blog has been well received yet there are people who have disagreed with her blog arguments being themselves principally opposed to the idea of entry of migrants into Sweden.

4.2 Everyday spatio-temporal interactions with 'others'

Our migrants use of social media, we found, provided them safe liminal spaces to start interacting with others and forging relevant transient relationships, particularly, with native Swedes. These geographically dispersed interactions with others, we found, had a profound influence on migrants' sense of their integration in their host country. Creating and maintaining bonds with the home and the host country through participation in virtual social groups, most of our migrants said gave them a better insight into 'Scandinavian humour' and that they are keen on subscribing to online groups which appear to have a cosmopolitan-multicultural outlook. Nevertheless, we also found that migrants subscribe to different online groups to establish new and maintain connections with different social and professional networks both in the home and the host country. They frequently seek interactions with local people in the host country by becoming members of online groups and socialising with other group members there. This is due to a common challenge of lack of access to local networks among migrants since many migrants find it difficult to establish connections with local Swedes in the offline world. They consider joining an online community as a way to ease the process of creating a local network. At the same time, their participating in other non-Swedish groups related to their home countries enabled them to maintain connections with their roots. As explained by Liz:

Swedes are generally very nice and friendly, but it can take a long time to build a deep and meaningful bond. Most of our friends are expats. Swedes are by nature reserved people. So, unlike the US where you'll strike up a conversation with anyone in a coffee shop, that doesn't happen here [Liz].

Our migrants suggest that being a member of an online network can help migrants to overcome the incipient challenge of making Swede friends on the hoof. They shared the view that many of their online friendships have helped them to access much needed social services and also connected with local people in offline settings. As observed by Vicky:

I've met a lot of different people on these Facebook groups. There's a local group [...] it connects me with people from my arm-chair, it's online space contacting people, but it's not the same like contacting with people face to face [...]there are different groups, some from Australia, all kind of labels, living in Stockholm, living in Sweden, Swedish Australian couples [Vicky].

We found among the participants in our study that their membership in online communities helped them maintain their relationship with friends, families and networks in the country of origin. However, this membership of virtual communities did not help them to get closer to the local community since spending so much time online, reduced migrants' efforts in meeting with local people face to face.

4.3 Approval seeking and relational interdependencies

Approval seeking and relational interdependencies as used in developing our finding refers to migrants' efforts to developing building relational networks within their host country that has the potential to enhance their personal capacity building efforts. An upshot of this is a sense of belongingness and approval results from the process of migrants' creating group attachment to both the country of residence and country of origin. Group attachment describes the desire of seeking approval in the country of residence of the country of origin. The desire of seeking approval involves the degree of how migrants associate themselves with the country of residence and origin based on the reactions of the local people in the country of residence and the country of origin to their online activities. Our data suggests that the feeling of being accepted plays an important role in the degree of migrants' attachment to the country of residence and origin. For example, if the level of responses from the local people is low, the migrants develop the feeling of being rejected online, which affects the sense of belonging offline, Mahdi explained:

It depends on the reactions of the persons in conversations. When I write, I get responses from the (Swedish) person I am addressing, I feel like I'm am part of it. But if I write stuff, and they ignore me and they just answer each other, I feel like I'm not part of the group [Mahdi].

On the other hand, if local people engage in the migrants' social media activities, migrants develop the feeling of being accepted online, which influences the sense of belonging offline. For instance, Quynh admits:

'When I first came here, I had trouble actually having face-to-face contact with Swedes [...] But with Facebook, it helps you to get into more personal topics easily, so for example, I joined this group called XYZ so there is everyone coming from Sweden, Afghanistan, people just post whatever they want and sometimes people answer their posts [...] So that has helped a lot with integration because I was sometimes able to pick up some new phrases and also talked to different people about music [...] In a way, the online process makes you feel a bit more as if you belong to the society because you get the answer back from people and you feel a little bit more secure and more confident about yourself' [Quynh].

In this situation, the responses received from local people on Facebook makes Quynh feel that she was accepted in the group, which boosts her confidence about herself. The sense of being heard seems to be addressed through the types of responses that the respondents received. If successful acculturation were to be appreciated through the translation of online friendships into offline ones, then it is unclear whether this might actually happen, and even if it did, how long this might be after being friends on social media is also shrouded in mystery. On the other hand, if we are to assume that we now have parallel digital lives embedded on social media, then cohesive influences garnered through rich online exchanges on social media platforms are likely to lead to aspirations of being part of corresponding offline communities. As we found among our respondents who spent such lengths of time interacting with their online friends, that they didn't have any time to interact face to face in the physical world. Among some of our respondents this excessive online time made them feel isolated in the physical world. So while the desire to be among friends drove our respondents to spend more time on social media platforms yet after spending increasingly longer than initially envisaged, they actually felt overwhelmed by isolation in the offline world.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we examine migrants' social media use to explore how they may lead to a meaningful assessment of their acculturation and consequent integration in their host societies'. The findings from our study and its contribution to extending our understanding of the potential influence of migrants social media use on their acculturation and subsequent integration can be divided into three broad outcomes. First, migrants cross cultural communication with 'others' via social media has profound influence on their acculturation and integration. In this regard, migrants' sense of engagement with

'others', were not simply rooted in physical interactions. Rather, their experiences of interacting, receiving, and sharing information and goodwill with their home and host country nationals via social media gives form and shape to their acculturation in practice (Lissitsa 2016; White and Abu-Rayya, 2012). Migrants who actively created social media contents, we observed, frequently enjoyed a two-way communication with their co-nationals as well as Swedish nationals. On the other end of the continuum, those migrants who contributed very little content, and appeared as 'passive' receivers and consumers of news and information on social media, demonstrated little sense of engagement with their communities. Thus, we posit that migrants' social media activities, in particular, their contribution to content can serve as a proxy to gauging their acculturation, and in turn their integration in the home societies' (Davis, 2010; Misoch, 2015).

Second, consistent with findings from prior studies on the relevance of temporal interactions with others via social media (Dekkar et al., 2015; Schumann et al. (2012), our migrants maintenance of relational ties with co-nationals as part of online co-national group, we found, reinforced a sense of 'digital togetherness' (Marino, 2015), despite being geographically dispersed. For instance, Quynh's online interactions with groups of parents, with at least one non-Swedish partner, demonstrates the bridging of the narrow cleavages between inter-ethnic migrants (Dekkar et al. 2015). Nevertheless, the taken-for-granted assumption that stronger online relationships could lead to similar offline ones, does not seem to be borne out by our evidence set. In particular, online interactions, we surmise from our conversations with our migrants took up so much time that 'face to face' meeting becomes practically impossible. further to simultaneous professional and other work commitments. This lack of time to offline interactions.

Third, in relation to migrants' sense of belongingness as evidenced through their social media use, the interactive intensity of the exchanges that the interviewees of this study narrated does attest to the characterisation of national identity findings of Glukov (2017), and Schumann et al.'s (2012) research. Potentially the realisation that migrant narratives are being shared tends to encourage their desire to participate in ongoing conversations that they find to be inclusive. Over a passage of time

when migrants experience a conscious exchange of experiences along with assurances to contribute to those conversations then such interactions are likely to instil trust in the minds of participants. When such online conversations acquire a voice imbued by migrants' sense of belongingness, it might lead them to identify themselves with Swedish values and local traditions. Our study extends the study of Schumann et al. (2012) in which interaction among Facebook groups brought about a reduction in prejudices and a mutual acceptance of participants, by ascertaining views of migrants using social media through face to face interviews. However, given that our evidence was primarily premised on gauging social media use of migrants, whether online trust necessarily leads to offline cohesion is not clear through our study. In a context where migrants spend longer engaged in online exchanges, it is probable that people remain online friends for the rest of their lives without ever meeting in the physical world.

5.1 Contribution to theory:

While research on acculturation within the domain of migration studies has been growing over the last few decades yet these have unequivocally related to the offline world. Research on social media use or online interactivity by migrants, as can be discerned through our literature survey in this paper, is disparate and consists of a variety of cohorts like those characterised by religious identities, a specific nationality, or that of students pursuing higher studies. Our study is novel because we examine acculturation prospects based on migrants' (from different countries of origins) use of social media in Sweden. Such groups may have significant country of origin influences on their proclivities to maintain identity as well as relationships in the offline world. Using the three parameters of online engagement, affiliations to community, and sense of belongingness in migrant use of social media, we attest to the four types of acculturation outcomes as found in Berry (1997) viz. those of integration, assimilation, separation/segregation, and marginalisation. This study set about to investigate the influence of social media in aiding migrants to acculturate and eventually integrate into host societies. Swedish cities like Stockholm, Jönköping, Malmö, and Gothenburg were the context of host societies from which evidence was garnered for the study. Our research extends acculturation theory of Berry (1997, 2005, 2013) in

several ways. First, we relied upon a process perspective of social media use. Given the complex and fluid nature of social media use, it is difficult to estimate its influence on acculturation without specific calibration of such use. Second, we applied acculturation theory to online characterisations of engagement, affiliation to community, and sense of belongingness of migrants. Research studies in the domain of migrant acculturation, or the lack of it have hitherto been with regard to the physical world of face to face engagements. In contrast our study has used the online world of social media use of migrants to assess influence on their acculturative propensities. Third, we point out that given the contemporary influence of social media, the migrants' use of it is one of the important determinants of the acculturation process in the present context of international migration. The use of social media tends to act both as an enabler and inhibitor to the acculturation process. When migrants receive responses from local users in the host country, then social media facilitates migrants' sense of engagement, community and belongingness towards the host country. When the level of responses from local users in the host country is low, migrants' use of social media hinders migrants' sense of engagement, community and belongingness towards the host country; instead our study indicated that migrants are then encouraged to create stronger connections to their home countries.

As observed by Vaidhyanathan (2018), despite the good intentions that saw the creation of social media platforms such as Facebook, they have metamorphosed into energizing hatred and bigotry, and eroded social trust among millions of its users around the world. Our study and the findings we report suggest that liminality in social-media based narratives when some users felt discouraged to try to integrate choosing to strengthen links with home country participants instead. While some of our respondents clearly felt drawn towards integrating into the host society yet their experiences of being isolated at the same time highlights the ambiguity and uncertainty that is naturally embedded in their narratives. The narrative of migrant journeys that include acculturation is one that involves an extensive length of time. The extent of readiness and desire to evolve contributes to the capacity of migrants to acculturate from home country orientations to host country ones. In a journey where the first stage is fraught with a profound lack of knowledge of the host culture and the final stage

where successful acculturation has taken place, our study shows that there is a liminal middle stage which is defined by uncertainty and disorientation that the migrants experience.

5.2 Contribution to practice:

Governments around the world who are faced with challenges of migration (cf. Richmond and Shields, 2005; Hujo and Piper, 2007) seem to be of the opinion that introducing various online means of communication would automatically encourage interaction between host nationals and migrants that would in turn lead to integration into host societies (see for example, Komito, 2011; Hiller and Franz, 2004). Our study casts doubt on this myth through findings that show that a spectrum of outcomes may be consequential as a result of promotion of social media-based interactions. While some migrants may feel distinctly excluded and hence isolated, leading to them strengthening ties with nationals in their home countries, some may connect with the online world of hosts yet may never find the opportunity to integrate in the physical world. Our results also suggest important practical implications for both policymakers and migrants. Social media plays an important role in migrants' integration into host societies; however, migrants' use of social media and online interactions should be combined with offline interactions. Social media and online interactions cannot replace offline activities. Promoting the use of social media and online interactions might vary from one migrant group to another due to their situations, their background and length of time in Sweden. For example, as was evidenced in our study, newly arrived migrants who live on social welfare, might be keen to interact with host nationals more in the offline than online worlds. Whereas, migrants who have lived in Sweden for a longer time and who are employed, might find online interactions more suitable.

5.3 Areas of further research:

Several participants in our study along with key contributors in extant literature have observed that acculturation is a two-way process. While migrants need to learn the local language and conform to local culture similarly the host community also needs to engage and interact with migrant groups. Respondents in our study have referred to *inter alia* the formal nature of conversations with Swedish social media participants, the slowness of responses to interact with migrants. Now these may be

explicable from a Swedish standpoint. So, although we have considered the narratives of fifteen social media using migrants in our research, yet we haven't interviewed any Swedes or members of the host country to get their side of the story. Through our interactions with migration researchers in Sweden we became aware of the variations in acculturation propensities among different migrant groups. So, the study could be extended in the future to include other cities that also have significant numbers of migrant populations. Further migrant groups including Somali, Lebanese, Chinese and the like could be part of a future evidence base that could enrich our research.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky's words (quoted at the start of this paper) in his novel, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) may have been about a time when there was just one world – the offline world. However, if we are to examine the contemporary world of migrant use of social media, little seems to have really changed regarding the doubts about integration that were expressed by Dostoyevsky (1880) then.

6. References

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