SOCIAL NETWORK SITES AS BRIDGES OR BARRIERS? INTERCULTURAL ADAPTATION AND DIGITAL ACCULTURATION OF MIGRANT ADOLESCENTS

SOCIAL NETWORK SITES COME PONTI O BARRIERE? L'ADATTAMENTO INTERCULTURALE E ACCULTURAZIONE DIGITALE DEGLI ADOLESCENTI MIGRANTI

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the role of Social Network Sites (SNSs) in the intercultural adaptation of migrant adolescents in Italian CPIAs. Using a quantitative approach, it analyses the use of SNSs in relation to origin, digital skills and level of adaptation. The results highlight a use that is more oriented towards identity maintenance than integration. Educational pathways for critical and inclusive media use are suggested.

Lo studio esplora il ruolo dei Social Network Sites (SNS) nell'adattamento interculturale degli adolescenti migranti nei CPIA italiani. Attraverso un approccio quantitativo, analizza l'uso dei SNS rispetto alla provenienza, alle competenze digitali e ai livelli di adattamento. I risultati evidenziano un uso orientato al mantenimento identitario più che all'integrazione. Si suggeriscono percorsi educativi per un uso critico e inclusivo dei media.

KEYWORDS

Social Network Sites; intercultural adaptation; migrant adolescents, digital practices; inclusive education.

Social Network Sites; adattamento interculturale; adolescenti migranti; pratiche digitali; educazione inclusiva.

Introduction

The intercultural and linguistic adaptation of migrant adolescents is increasingly complex due to the pervasive influence of digital technologies. Unlike previous generations, these adolescents face language barriers and cultural differences within digitally mediated environments. For unaccompanied minors, the lack of family or social support exacerbates vulnerabilities during adaptation. Digital contexts significantly shape their social and cultural transitions, impacting identity formation, integration, and access to cultural, social, labor, and educational resources (ISMU, 2025).

Although digital technologies may be considered a strategic resource—fostering socialisation, enabling access to information, and maintaining ties with the country of origin—their influence on how adolescents construct meaning in the host society remains unclear. Therefore, it is still uncertain whether digital technologies support or hinder inclusion, and whether they contribute to dynamics of isolation or symbolic exclusion. Consequently, it is essential to develop educational and training approaches that take into account the impact of these technologies. Such approaches should aim to promote critical and conscious digital competences. These skills play a key role in enabling migrant adolescents to integrate positively into new socio-cultural environments.

In recent years, an increasing body of research has documented how social media are transforming communication, access to information, and relationship-building within migration processes (Mancini et al., 2019; Akter et al., 2024). Migrants use these tools to maintain transnational connections, access information and cultural content, and build new social networks in the host country (Ju et al., 2021). However, most of this research focuses on adults or young adults, such as migrant workers, refugees, or international students (Akter et al., 2024). It highlights the use of social media for gathering information, expanding social and professional networks (Lai et al., 2022), and meeting various psychological and social needs. These include affective needs—ranging from deep emotional bonds to more superficial interactions—along with needs for self-fulfilment and identity-building, related to self-esteem and social recognition. Other needs involve integration, through inclusion in specific communities or broader society, and personal well-being, such as stress relief or temporary escape from difficult circumstances (Kircaburun et al., 2023; Zhao & Zhou, 2021). However, how these needs are met varies significantly based on cultural, socio-economic, and demographic factors.

Conversely, research specifically addressing migrant adolescents remains scarce. However, this group is particularly relevant for understanding how digital technologies affect intercultural, linguistic, and relational adaptation during developmental stages.

This discrepancy underscores the necessity for further exploration into the potential contributions of Social Network Sites (henceforth SNSs) to acculturation and adaptation processes in this particularly sensitive and pivotal age group. A more profound comprehension of these dynamics could serve as the foundation for the development of more efficacious educational interventions, with the objective of promoting a deliberate and functional utilisation of digital media, to the advantage of young migrants' social and linguistic integration.

The project "*Vie di uscita: storie di scatti e di vita*", developed within the research activities envisaged by the Project of Excellence of the Department of Comparative Linguistic and Cultural Studies of the Ca' Foscari University of Venice (2023-2027), is part of this perspective. The survey's initial phase is quantitative and descriptive in nature, with the objective of investigating the impact of SNSs on the acculturation processes and socio-cultural and linguistic adaptation of migrant adolescents enrolled in Provincial Centres for Adult Education (CPIA) in north-eastern Italy. Given the demographic composition of the sample (N=40), which exhibited a pronounced polarisation between students hailing from Eastern Europe (primarily Albania, Kosovo, Moldova and Ukraine) and from Asia (particularly Bangladesh, Pakistan and China), it was deemed methodologically sound to analyse any potential disparities associated with geographical area of origin. These disparities might be indicative of varying cultural, linguistic and technological access backgrounds.

The primary research questions that guided the study were as follows:

1. How do migrant adolescents use SNSs in digital acculturation practices in the country of arrival? Are there significant differences in SNSs acculturation practices (in its digital competencies, cultural, and language dimensions) between migrant adolescents from Eastern Europe and adolescents of Asian origin?

2. To what extent do SNSs practices of acculturation (digital, cultural and language) vary according to levels of intercultural adaptation (low, medium, high)?

3. Are digital SNSs acculturation practices associated with a higher likelihood of supporting intercultural adaptation?

To address the questions, a series of statistical analyses were conducted. Firstly, t-test analyses were conducted for group comparisons (question 1). Secondly, one-

way ANOVAs were conducted for the purpose of testing differences between adaptation levels (question 2). Thirdly, multiple linear regressions were conducted for the purpose of identifying relationships between digital SNSs acculturation practices and intercultural adaptation (question 3).

This exploratory study investigates how migrant adolescents utilize Social Network Sites (SNSs) and assesses whether their practices facilitate or impede their adaptation processes. Considering that CPIAs represent one of the first formal contexts these students engage with upon arrival in the host country, their role is pivotal. The findings seek to offer valuable insights to inform educational practices, enabling the development of targeted strategies aimed at supporting students' social and academic inclusion through informed and critical guidance on media use.

1. Literature review

1.1 Adaptation and acculturation

Among the earliest theoretical contributions on intercultural adaptation, Berry's (1997) two-dimensional model had a major impact in defining acculturation as a process of cognitive, emotional and behavioural change in response to the demands of the new environment. Berry's (2019) seminal study distinguished four acculturative strategies – integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation – based on the degree of retention of the culture of origin and participation in the host culture. In a similar vein, Searle and Ward (1990) propose a distinction between psychological adaptation, which is associated with subjective well-being, and sociocultural adaptation, which is defined as competence in dealing with everyday situations in a new cultural context.

To measure this latter dimension, the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) was developed, based on the work of Furnham and Bochner (1982), which assesses the ability to cope with practical contexts such as institutional interactions, urban orientation and new ways of life. Overall, these models highlight the interdependence between acculturation processes and forms of adaptation, emphasising the multidimensional nature of intercultural experience. Subsequently, Ward and Kennedy (1999) expanded and adapted the SCAS to include new areas related to understanding the socio-political context and the intercultural perspective, making the instrument more flexible and applicable to

different migration contexts. In parallel, Demes and Geeraert (2014) enriched the theoretical framework with the development of new scales oriented towards measuring acculturation processes, including the Brief Acculturation Orientation Scale (BAOS). Their contribution highlighted the relationship between orientation towards the culture of origin and openness towards the host culture, pointing out that a strong attachment to the former can hinder adaptation, while openness to the latter facilitates the process, both psychologically and socially.

In this study, however, the focus was specifically on the intercultural dimension understood as sensitivity and openness to cultural diversity, a perspective that allows the adaptive process to be understood in more qualitative and transformative terms. For this reason, the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire (ICSSQ) was adopted, based on the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) developed by Bennett (1993) and subsequently adapted by Kuusisto et al. (2015). This model proposes a view of the development of interculturality as a continuum from an ethnocentric stage, in which one's own culture is considered central and superior, to an ethnorelative stage, characterised by the ability to understand, appreciate and value cultural diversity. Unlike previous instruments, the ICSSQ is not simply adapted to the educational field but was expressly designed to analyse intercultural sensitivity in school educational contexts, making it particularly relevant to the aim of this research.

1.2 Migrant adolescents and their digital adaptation processes

In recent years, the diffusion of digital technologies among migrants has fostered the coming together of two traditionally separate research fields: migration studies and digital media studies. The increasing pervasiveness of ICTs has given rise to "digital migration studies", exploring how mobile devices and digital platforms influence migration experiences at every stage from arrival to integration (Leurs & Smets, 2018; Akter et al., 2024). However, although ICTs are recognised as empowerment tools, research in this area is still fragmented and lacks a consolidated theoretical framework, with gaps evident in the European context, where studies are often limited to emergency situations (Latonero, 2012; Ponzanesi & Leurs, 2014; Benezer & Zetter, 2014; Gillespie et al., 2016; Chouliaraki, 2017; Akter et al., 2024).

This gap is also evident in the Italian academic context, where despite increased interest in immigration and intercultural education (Santerini, 2020) and preliminary studies on migrant technology use, research on social media's specific impact on adolescent acculturation within CPIAs remains scarce and fragmented. While recent work (Tonelli, 2020) highlights technology's role in communication and language learning among CPIA migrants, systematic investigations into SNSs' contribution to intercultural adaptation in these settings are still lacking.

In this context, Mancini et al. (2019) and Akter et al. (2024) have attempted to offer a mapping between adaptation and technology use by highlighting the paucity of studies on the role of social media in adolescents' migration experience. Indeed, the latter constitute a vulnerable but strategic age group, the intercultural adaptation of which in relation to the use of digital technologies remains to be extensively explored. It is crucial that research is conducted in this field in order to develop effective educational interventions that can consciously integrate social media into reception and inclusion pathways.

Several pioneering studies suggest that SNSs can foster intercultural adaptation. Veronis et al. (2018) found, through focus groups with Syrian youth in Ottawa, that SNSs support empowerment of agency and access to practical information by creating "virtual contact zones" where youth negotiate their cultural identities. Similarly, Tudsri & Hebbani (2015) found that the use of digital media in Brisbane facilitated integration among young Hazara refugees, with linguistic variables influencing SNSs use: some use media to connect to the local community, others to maintain ties with their culture of origin. However, barriers such as stigmatisation, cost of services and digital inequality limit the inclusive potential of social media.

Kutscher & Kreß (2018) examined digital opportunities for unaccompanied minors in Germany, finding that although access to the Internet and devices was limited, SNSs played a key role in the migration process, helping young people cope with the migration journey, acquire language skills and maintain social ties. Studies by Alam & Imran (2015) and Bacishoga et al. (2016) confirm that difficulties in accessing technology affect the social inclusion of refugees, but SNSs remain an important communication and support tool.

Despite these insights, research predominantly focuses on adults and young adults (Mancini et al., 2019; Akter et al., 2024), neglecting the migrant adolescent, a crucial segment in the process of intercultural adaptation. This article aims to offer

a contribution to begin exploring this area by investigating the link between acculturation practices through SNSs and migrant adolescents' levels of intercultural adaptation. The aim is to help define inclusive educational practices that specifically address the needs of migrant adolescents in multicultural school contexts.

2. Methods and tools

Data collection, initiated in 2024, employed two instruments: the Digital Acculturation Practices Questionnaire for Migrant Adolescents (DAP-QAM), developed specifically for this study in Italian (Banzato, 2025), and the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire (ICSSQ) (Kuusisto et al., 2015), based on Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). Both instruments utilize a six-point Likert scale.

The DAP-QAM assesses digital acculturation practices across three dimensions: digital skills, digital acculturation, and digital language learning. Its items were developed through a literature review on digital acculturation and media literacy and underwent a multi-phase validation process. An interdisciplinary expert panel evaluated item relevance and clarity, suggesting refinements. Subsequently, a pilot study with 8 migrant adolescents similar to the final sample tested item comprehensibility and relevance, providing feedback to optimize the instrument.

The initial section (comprising 16 items) explores digital competencies across three distinct categories: social (i.e., engaging with acquaintances, both Italian and from the individual's country of origin), updating (i.e., exhibiting interest in news, music and fashion, both Italian and from the country of origin) and production (i.e., publishing posts, disseminating multimedia content, participating in discussions and live videos).

The second section (seven items) analyses digital acculturation in three categories: passive acculturation (i.e., following Italian events and traditions online), active acculturation (i.e., direct participation, i.e. cooking Italian dishes following video recipes) and cultural socialisation (i.e., discovering Italian places, interacting with local communities, sharing posts with peers from one's home country and Italians).

The third section (13 items) explores the use of SNSs for the purpose of learning the Italian language. It includes the following: receptive learning (i.e. watching short

educational video created by Italian language teachers), language production (i.e., actively using Italian in posts and chats), language engagement (i.e., interacting with Italian or international peers), self-assessment (i.e., awareness of grammar and pronunciation) and the use of digital tools (i.e., automatic translators for comprehension and writing).

This framework facilitates the analysis of the influence of SNSs in integration processes, offering a detailed perspective on migrants' communicative, social, cultural and linguistic dynamics.

Adaptation was measured using the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire (ICSSQ; Kuusisto et al., 2016). The 23-item instrument assesses perception, understanding and response to cultural differences, describing the transition from an ethnocentric to an ethnorelative orientation. Originally developed in English for adolescents (12-16 years), it was adapted to the Italian context. The scores obtained were categorised into three levels (low, medium, high) and analysed in relation to data on SNSs use.

3. Results

3.1 Participants and use of SNSs

The study was conducted on a sample population of 57 participants who attended CPIA and who had obtained the necessary prior authorisation and informed consent. Incomplete questionnaires, or questionnaires completed by respondents of Italian nationality or characterised by random response patterns detected by statistical analysis, were excluded from the final dataset. In total, the answers of 40 migrant adolescents (mean age = 17.1 years; SD = 1.5; range = 15-21) were analysed, of whom 11 were female (27.5%) and 29 male (72.5%). The young people were predominantly from Bangladesh (n = 20; 50%), followed by Kosovo/Albania (n = 9; 22.5%), Ukraine/Moldova (n = 7; 17.5%), and China/Pakistan (n = 4; 10%). The majority of participants lived with their parents (n = 27; 67.5%), while others resided in the community (n = 9; 22.5%) or with relatives (n = 4; 10%). The average length of stay in Italy was 22.4 months (range = 2-83 months), with considerable variability in length of stay. The level of Italian proficiency varies: generally, reading comprehension is good; oral pronunciation ranges from average to good and is sufficiently adequate for informal conversations; written production is mostly

possible with the help of dictionaries and translators. During the administration of the questionnaire, both the researcher and the classroom teacher assisted participants by clarifying instructions and addressing any comprehension difficulties.

Participants (N=40) used an average of 4.8 social platforms, with YouTube (92.5%), WhatsApp (90%), Instagram and TikTok (both 82.5%) dominating, followed by Facebook (67.5%), Snapchat (47.5%) and Twitter (22.5%). The average daily usage time was 4.6 hours, with significant variations by geographical area: Ukraine/Moldavia (6.9 hours/day), China/Pakistan (5.4 hours/day), Kosovo/Albania (4.8 hours/day) and Bangladesh (4.0 hours/day). The distribution of daily usage showed that 47.5% of the participants spent 2-5 hours on social media (65% of Bangladeshis, 44% of Kosovars/Albanians, 29% of Ukrainians/Moldavians), 32.5% spent 6-8 hours (21% of Bangladeshis, 33% of Kosovars/Albanians, 57% of Ukrainians/Moldavians, 75% of Chinese/Pakistanis), while the remaining 20% were equally distributed between limited use of 1-2 hours (5% of Bangladeshis, 22% of Kosovars/Albanians) and intensive use of more than 8 hours (10% of Bangladeshis, 29% of Ukrainians/Moldavians, 25% of Chinese/Pakistanis).

3.2 Reliability and normality analysis of the sample

The reliability of the DAP-QAM questionnaire (36 items) was assessed by means of Cronbach's alpha coefficient and was found to be high overall (α = .884), confirming good internal consistency. The three dimensions of the questionnaire showed acceptable levels of reliability: digital skills (α = .701), digital acculturation (α = .753) and digital language learning (α = .867).

Given the large sample size (< 50), the Shapiro-Wilk test was used to check the normality of the distribution of scores. The results indicate a normal distribution both for the overall score (p = .680; Eastern Europe = .947; Asia = .120) and for the individual dimensions: digital skills (p = .318), digital acculturation (p = .593), digital language learning (p = .324). Normality was further confirmed by graphical analysis (Fig. 1).
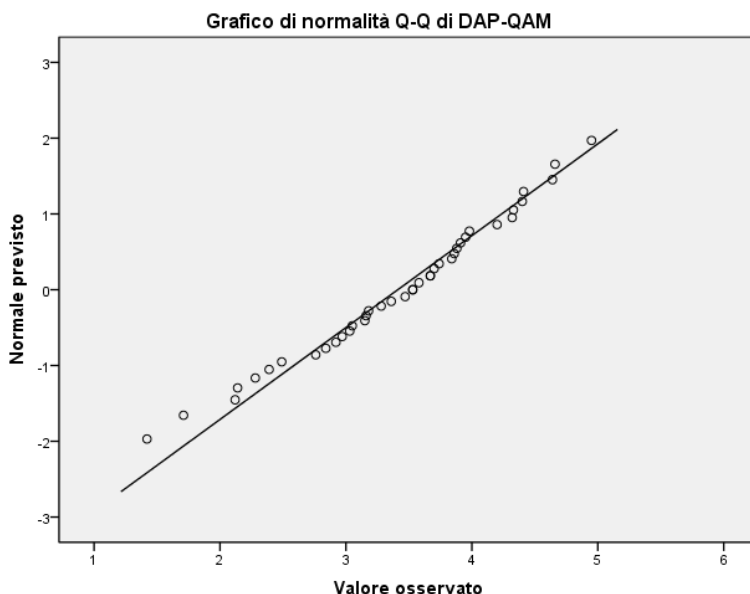
Figure 1. Q-Q graph supporting the normality of the distribution of DAP-QAM.

The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire (ICSSQ; Kuusisto et al., 2015) showed good internal reliability (α = .778). The distribution of scores was normal, as indicated by the Shapiro-Wilk test (p = .095; Eastern Europe = .272; Asia = .301), with respective averages of 3.14 and 3.28.

The overall scores were divided into three levels: low (1.00-2.99; n = 17), medium (3.00-4.00; n = 15) and high cross-cultural adaptation (4.01-6.00; n = 8). This classification allowed the categories to be used for ANOVA and multiple linear regression type analyses, facilitating the examination of differences with respect to the digital, cultural and linguistic dimensions of the DAP-QAM questionnaire.

3.3 DAP-QAM t-tests by geographical origin of the groups

Independent sample t-tests were conducted with the aim of analysing the results of the entire DAP-QAM questionnaire and the individual categories digital competence, digital acculturation, digital language learning) and comparing digital cultural and linguistic practices between migrant students from Asia and Eastern Europe.

The overall DAP-QAM questionnaire score was significantly higher in the Asian group (M = 3.67; SD = 0.83) than in the Eastern European group (M = 3.05; SD = 0.68), t(38) = 2.532; p = .016; 95% CI [-1.126; -0.125] (Figure 2).
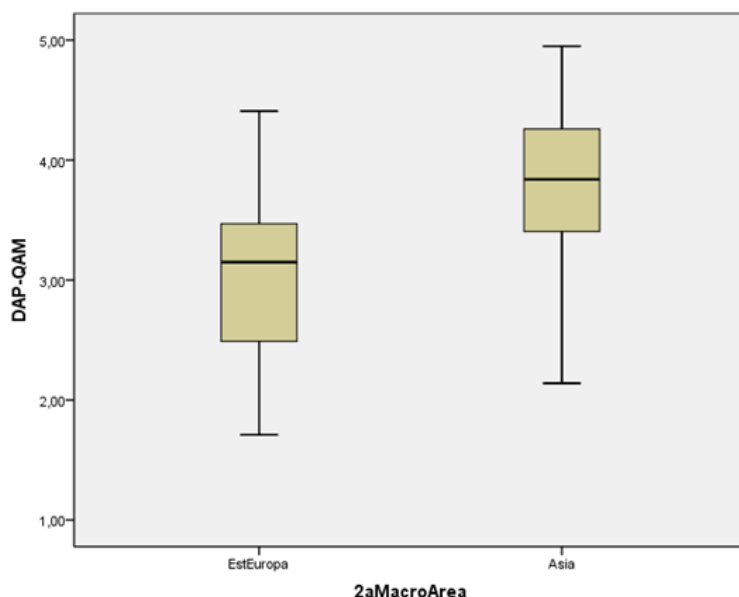

Figure 2. Boxplot of DAP-QAM among students from Eastern Europe and Asia.

Digital competencies were also significantly higher among Asian students (M = 3.63, SD = 0.14) than their Eastern European peers (M = 2.99, SD = 0.16), t(38) = -2.964, p = .005, 95% CI [-1.076, -.202]. No significant difference was found in the social sub-dimension, t(38) = -0.652, p = .518.

Significant differences emerged in the update sub-dimensions (Asian M = 4.41 vs. East European M = 3.43; t(38) = -2.256, p = .030, 95% CI [-1.367, -.073]) and production (Asian M = 3.14 vs. East European M = 2.14; t(38) = -2.912, p = .006, 95% CI [-1.688, -.324]).

The digital acculturation items showed no significant differences between the groups overall (t(38) = -1.509, p = .139), nor in the passive (t(38) = -1.603, p = .117) and active (t(38) = -0.066, p = .948) sub-dimensions. However, a significant difference was found in communication, with higher scores in the Asian group (M = 4.32, SD = 1.44) than in the Eastern European group (M = 3.35, SD = 1.44), t(38) = -2.082, p = .044, 95% CI [-1.919, -.026].

Items concerning digital language learning were significantly higher in the Asian group (M = 3.69, SD = 1.11) than in the Eastern European group (M = 3.00, SD = 0.99), t(38) = -2.082, p = .046, 95% CI [-1.919, -.026]. No significant differences were observed in the sub-dimensions commitment, tools, production or self-evaluation (all ps > .05). A significant difference emerged in the receptive sub-dimension (Asians M = 4.54, SD = 1.64 vs. Eastern Europeans M = 3.52, SD = 1.44), t(38) = -2.030, p = .049, 95% CI [-2.025, -.002] (see figure 3).
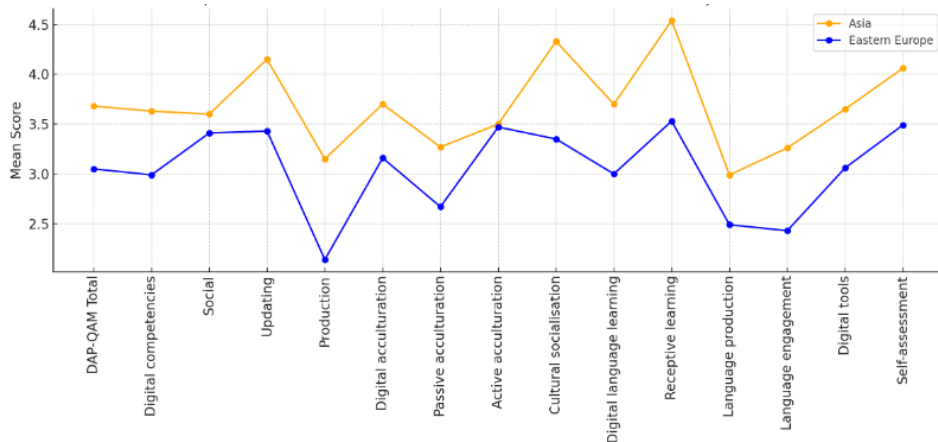

Figure 3. Comparison of Mean Scores Between Asian and Eastern European Students - DAP-QAM.

3.4 One-way ANOVA and multiple regression: ICSSQ and DAP-QAM

A one-way ANOVA analysis was conducted to compare the mean scores in the three dimensions of the DAP-QAM questionnaire (digital skills, digital acculturation and digital language learning) between the levels of intercultural adaptation (low, medium, high) as measured by the ICSSQ. The results showed no statistically significant differences between the groups, $F_s(2, 37) < 1.52$, $ps > .05$.

Specifically, no significant differences emerged either on the overall DAP-QAM score (F(2, 37) = 0.375, p = . 690, η^2 = .020), nor on digital competencies (F(2, 37) = 0.688, p = .509, η^2 = .036), digital acculturation (F(2, 37) = 1.513, p = .234, η^2 = .076), or digital language learning (F(2, 37) = 0.225, p = .800, η^2 = .012).

However, a potential positive trend was observed in the mean scores associated with increasing levels of intercultural adaptation, particularly in the dimensions of digital acculturation (M_low = 3.14; M_medium = 3.60; M_high = 3.93) and digital

language learning (M_low = 3.27; M_medium = 3.46; M_high = 3.58). This trend, while not significant in the present sample, suggests a possible latent effect to be investigated with larger samples or more sensitive analytical techniques.

A multiple linear regression was conducted to assess whether the three dimensions of the DAP-QAM questionnaire predicted levels of intercultural adaptation (ICSSQ). The model was not statistically significant, $F(3, 36) = 1.06$, $p = .379$, explaining a marginal proportion of the variance ($R^2 = .081$; R^2 adj = .004). The Durbin-Watson statistic (1.43) excluded autocorrelation in the residuals.

None of the three dimensions emerged as significant predictors. However, digital skills showed a potential trend association with adaptation ($\beta = .267$, $p = .206$, 95% CI [-.142, .636]). In contrast, digital acculturation ($\beta = -.059$, $p = .762$) and digital language learning ($\beta = .051$, $p = .832$) did not show significant effects. The diagnostic analyses confirmed the absence of multicollinearity and the robustness of the assumptions of normality and homoscedasticity of the residuals.

4. Discussion

The first research question aimed to explore whether there were significant differences in acculturative practices through SNSs—specifically in the digital competencies, cultural, and linguistic dimensions—between migrant students from Eastern Europe and those of Asian origin. The findings provide an interesting perspective on the role played by SNSs in the intercultural adaptation processes of young migrants in Italy.

Overall, Asian students reported significantly higher scores in digital competencies (M = 3.62, SD = 0.64) compared to their Eastern European peers (M = 3.18, SD = 0.69). In particular, this difference is evident in the sub-dimensions of updating (Asian: M = 3.75; Eastern European: M = 3.16) and content production (Asian: M = 3.38; Eastern European: M = 2.83). These results suggest that Asian students show greater proactivity in using SNSs as tools for information and participation. By contrast, Eastern European students appear to adopt a more limited and passive approach.

No significant differences emerged in the social dimension of SNS use, with very similar values between groups (Asian: M = 3.92; Eastern European: M = 3.89). This suggests that both groups use digital platforms in comparable ways to maintain

relationships with family and friends, particularly from their countries of origin. This finding contributes to a broader reflection on intercultural adaptation. While social media appear to be effective in reinforcing ties with the culture of origin, they seem less effective in supporting acculturation and integration within the Italian social context.

Regarding cultural items, the overall mean was slightly higher in the Asian group (M = 3.54) than in the Eastern European group (M = 3.44), though the difference was not statistically significant. However, the sub-dimension of cultural communication showed a slight disparity (Asians M = 3.60; Eastern Europeans M = 3.30), suggesting that Asian students showed a propensity, albeit moderate, to dialogue or share content with their network. Interest in distinctive aspects of Italian culture—such as traditional events or local festivities (e.g. Carnival, Historical Regatta)—was generally low in both groups. Some engagement was observed in relation to Italian cuisine, although this content was mainly shared with fellow nationals rather than with Italian peers.

This pattern aligns with previous studies (Mancini et al., 2019; Kutscher & Kreß, 2018), which show that migrant adolescents tend to use social media primarily to maintain ties with their culture of origin. They rarely employ these tools as a means to explore the host society or support their integration process. The consumption of content (i.e., music, news, fashion) in one's mother tongue is a way to preserve cultural identity and cope with the migration experience in a less disorienting way. In this sense, the mother tongue remains the privileged channel for recreational activities, while the Italian language is used in a limited way and mostly for contingent needs due to residing in Italy.

With regard to language learning through SNSs, the data reveal a slight advantage for the Asian group (M = 3.57) compared to the Eastern European group (M = 3.40). This difference is more evident in the receptive dimension, such as the ability to follow videos of teachers explaining in Italian or to understand written messages (Asians M = 3.85; Europeans M = 3.39).

However, both groups show limited engagement in more active practices. Activities like writing posts in Italian or participating in language study groups on SNSs received lower scores in the production dimension (Asian M = 3.29; Eastern European M = 3.15).

This trend suggests that learning Italian via SNSs is often a secondary activity. It appears to be subordinated to relational, emotional, or entertainment-related needs that are already established.

The results suggest that SNSs are predominantly used to maintain transnational ties rather than for local integration. This pattern contrasts with studies on adult migrants (Mancini et al., 2019; Akter et al., 2024), which document a more instrumental use of digital platforms for socio-cultural adaptation.

In light of these results, and considering interaction with native peers as a key indicator of intercultural adaptation, the hypothesis of a potential risk of digital self-segregation emerges. This phenomenon would be amplified by the prevalent use of the native language and the preferential enjoyment of culturally specific content from one's country of origin (hobbies, fashion, music). In this perspective, SNSs could be configured as environments that reinforce self-referential cultural identities, thus limiting opportunities for intercultural dialogue and exchange.

This hypothesis finds theoretical support in platform algorithmic dynamics, which privilege content consistent with users' previous preferences, generating "cultural silos" (Gillespie, 2018) and "filter bubbles" (Pariser, 2011). Similarly, immediate gratification mechanisms (likes, views) could incentivize interaction within familiar digital environments, reducing exposure to heterogeneous content.

Based on these considerations, it is suggested that SNS may configure themselves as closed communicative spaces that, paradoxically, hinder intercultural openness rather than facilitate it.

The second research question set out to investigate how digital acculturation practices via SNSs vary according to the levels of intercultural adaptation (low, medium, high) of migrant students. The one-way ANOVA revealed statistically significant differences between the adaptation groups for none of the dimensions analysed. These results suggest that, in the sample considered, digital competences are not influenced by the level of adaptation of migrant students. However, a more in-depth analysis of the averages in the three groups by means of linear multiple regression reveals interesting trends that deserve exploratory attention. In particular, an increasing progression of the mean scores in digital acculturation is observed as a function of the level of adaptation: from M = 3.14 (SD = 0.71) in the low adaptation group, to M = 3.60 (SD = 0.45) in the medium group, to M = 3.93 (SD = 0.46) in the high adaptation group. A similar dynamic was found in the

dimension of language learning by SNSs, with scores increasing from M = 3.27 (SD = 0.66) to M = 3.46 (SD = 0.53) and finally to M = 3.58 (SD = 0.43).

Although these differences did not reach statistical significance, it is possible to hypothesise the presence of a latent effect, potentially detectable with larger samples or through the use of more sensitive analytical methodologies. This trend suggests that greater intercultural adaptation might be associated with a more conscious exploration of digital content and a more active and reflective use of language, even within digital environments. Students with higher levels of adaptation seem, in fact, to show greater mastery in moving between different cultural contents and greater linguistic openness, elements that may be reflected in everyday life practices.

In line with the literature on the digital divide (van Dijk, 2005; Helsper, 2021; Pasta & Rivoltella, 2022), these data might suggest that for this sample the differences lie not so much in the access to technologies, but in the critical and cultural, as well as functional pragmatic use of them. Therefore, even in the absence of statistically significant results, the observed patterns deserve attention, as they open up relevant avenues of research in the area of intercultural education and digital inclusion.

From an educational point of view, the results highlight the importance of educational interventions that promote a conscious, multilingual and culturally and critically aware use of the potential of digital media, capable of enhancing migrant students' competencies and supporting their integration path. Digital education, from this perspective, cannot disregard an approach that takes into account digital and intercultural practices and students' multiple identities, given the intensive and pervasive use of SNSs by migrant adolescents.

Conclusions

The findings reveal the complex relationship between SNSs use and intercultural adaptation among migrant adolescents, shedding light on SNSs' role in acculturation within CPIAs in Northeast Italy. Asian-origin students exhibit greater digital skills and more active engagement than their Eastern European peers, especially in information seeking and content creation. Nonetheless, SNS use

primarily serves to maintain transnational ties rather than to explore the host culture or facilitate language acquisition.

A significant portion of adolescents engage in limited, passive SNSs use, reinforcing identity without critical awareness of algorithmic influences that perpetuate preferences tied to age, language, and origin culture. This dynamic may contribute to "digital self-segregation" (see Section 4, Discussion), where online interactions mirror ethno-linguistic affiliations instead of fostering inclusion.

Although intercultural adaptation does not show statistically significant effects, positive trends emerge between digital skills, digital acculturation, and language learning. This suggests that proficiency in digital tools may foster openness and participation.

These findings reveal a notable gap in literature and practice. Although Bruinenberg et al. (2021) note some structured media education for migrant adolescents, such programs are scarce. Urgent development of interventions is needed to integrate critical digital skills, intercultural support, and algorithmic awareness, expanding the linguistic and cultural resources for this group's digital interactions.

While migrant adults demonstrate more strategic use of digital media (Mancini et al., 2019; Lai et al., 2022; Akter et al., 2024), it remains unclear how to guide adolescents towards integrative practices that avoid digital self-segregation. From an educational perspective, it is necessary to move beyond basic digital media introduction by fostering critical reflection on online practices and raising awareness of algorithmic processes that limit exposure to diverse content.

SNSs, as culturally situated environments, can either reinforce existing affiliations or promote hybrid identities. To become effective tools for inclusion, educational practices must harness their transformative potential by fostering digital citizenship that is conscious, multilingual, and interculturally competent.

The main limitations of this study are the small sample size and the self-reported nature of the data. Future research should expand the empirical base, employ mixed-methods approaches, and further investigate the role of school and community contexts. Additionally, it is essential to develop educational practices that are culturally sensitive and capable of integrating social media as inclusive learning environments.

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