

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Relationship Between the Use of Social Media and Cross-Cultural Competency Among International Students in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract:

This study investigates the role of social media in helping international students in Saudi Arabia develop cross-cultural competency. “International students” is a term that has vastly been perceived to describe students who study in the USA, Canada, and Europe. However, Saudi Arabia—one of the biggest Middle Eastern Countries—has successfully attracted over 50 thousand international students who represent 159 countries around the world to come and study in Saudi Arabia. This influx of students represents different cultural backgrounds. The study uses a survey that snowballed into potential participants, all of whom are international students in Saudi Arabia. A total number of 134 participants successfully completed the survey (of whom 121 are males). The study found that 113 participants gained cross-cultural competency, conditioning that they own social media accounts, spend some time daily on social media, and interact with global content. The study concludes that more research is needed on the population of international students in Saudi Arabia as this population deserves more research-focused attention.

Keywords: International students, cross-cultural competency, social media, Saudi Arabia,

1. Introduction and Literature Review

Saudi Arabia is a country that attracts international students from different countries around the world. According to the Saudi Gazette (2022), over 50 thousand international students complete their studies in Saudi Arabia for the academic year 2021/2022. The Saudi Ministry of Education confirms that the study in Saudi Arabia has the goal of benefiting students who come from many countries around the world. Saudi Arabia has a set of advantages over other neighboring countries that made it stand out in attracting international students. The Saudi government offers scholarships to many international students. Those students come from many different countries around the world and study different majors in different cities in Saudi Arabia.

The importance of this paper comes from the fact that the attention of researchers has been given to Saudi international students in other countries, not international students in Saudi Arabia.

Little to no research attention has been given to international students in Saudi Arabia. Searching research databases on this topic, one can come across many research titles that investigate Saudi international students in other countries, but never the opposite. While there are some statistics on international students in Saudi Arabia (their number, country of origin, gender, age, religion, etc.), there is still a strong need to study this population. Studying this population will help make their experiences better and help the country attract more. This study achieves the goal of giving the deserving attention to the international students in Saudi Arabia. While there are many topics to be investigated on this important population, this current paper explores the relationship between social media use and cross-cultural competency among international students in Saudi Arabia since social media is an important topic, and studying its relation to cross-cultural competencies can enrich and deepen our understanding of how this relation can reinforce or hinder cultural mutuality, understandings, and competencies.

2. Cultural Facts about Saudi Arabia

Understanding Saudi Arabia's importance of location, population, language, religion, culture, and expatriate influx helps contextualize this paper. In the next section, I contextualize these facts to help place this study within the field of communication studies.

2.1. Location and Population

Saudi Arabia is a hub for the culture in the Middle East. It is known for its unique cultural aspects for the rich history attached to it. While the country itself was founded and officially given its current name on September 23, 1932, it possesses historical values and traditions that date back to thousands of years in the Arabian Peninsula. As the largest country in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia is located between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and its land size is 2,149,690 km² (829,999 mi²). It has gained 19th place in the ranking of the world economy (GMI, 2022). According to the 2022 census, the population of Saudi Arabia is 35.84 million, ranking 41st in the world population, and accounts for 0.46% of the world population (GMI, 2022). Saudi Arabia is also known for its expatriates. According to 2021 statistics, the expat population in Saudi Arabia is 13.49 million, more than one-third of the total population of Saudi Arabia (GMI, 2022); however, according to the General Authority for Statistics, the expat in the Saudi labor force has declined due to the Saudization policy. The following chart showcases the population distribution per city.

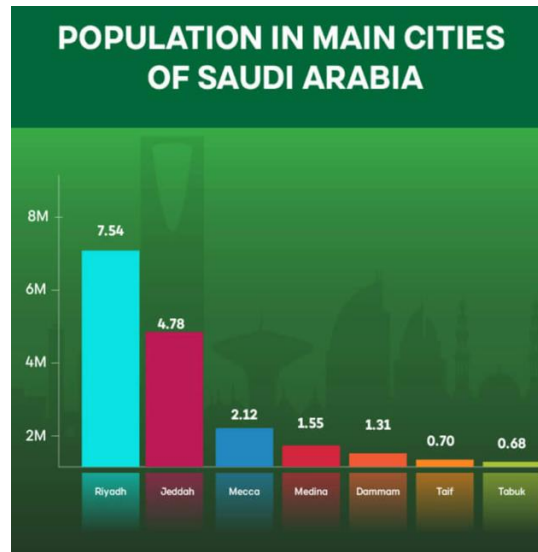


Figure 1: Population Distribution Per City in KSA. Source (Global Media Insights, 2022).

2.2. Expatriate Influx

According to population statistics in 2021, Saudi Arabia has reported that the expat population has exceeded 13 million. This population is linguistically, religiously, and culturally diverse, and they represent different world continents. The following chart shows the number of expatriates in Saudi Arabia by country.

Country	Number of expats
India	2,550,000
Syria	2,500,000
Pakistan	2,450,000
Philippines	1,600,000
Bangladesh	1,300,000
Yemen	1,000,000
Egypt	900,000
Indonesia	850,000

Table 1: Expat Population in Saudi Arabia by Country

2.3 Religion and Official Language

According to the well-known and accredited Pew Research Center, roughly 93% of the Saudi population are Muslims, the 7% are the expats who work in Saudi Arabia but follow other religions. According to GMI (2022), 100% of Saudis are Muslims. Islam is the official religion of the country, and it drives the country’s cultural orientations and traditions. For example, the two largest events in the years (Eid Al-Adha and Eid-Alfitr) are Islamic, the way women dress is Islamic, the way people greet each other is Islamic, the way people host others is Islamic, and jurisprudential laws in the country are Islamic. Also, the systems of food preparation and serving,

work habits, raising kids, education, and transportation are all derived from Islamic beliefs. Islam is strongly related to Arabic language since the Muslims' holy book, Quran, is in Arabic and cannot be translated into English or any other language; only the meanings and interpretations of Quran are Islamically allowed to be translated. Therefore, the Arabic language is the official language in the country. It is the language of the law, the medium of instruction, and the language people use to communicate on a daily basis.

2.4. Vision 2030

This Vision 2030 is “a unique transformative economic and social reform blueprint that is opening Saudi Arabia up to the world” (Vision 2030, 2022). This vision aims at promoting education that contributes to economic growth, maximizing investment capabilities, privatizing government services, contributing to the national economy at full potential, rehabilitating economic cities, improving the business environment, increasing the competitiveness of the energy sector, developing digital infrastructure, building a unique regional logistical hub, increasing non-oil government revenue from 163 SAR billion to 1 trillion SAR, raising Saudi's ranking in the government effectiveness index, from 80 to 20, and promoting culture and entertainment (Vision 2030, 2022).

3. Education Context and Quality in Saudi Arabia

There are 29 public universities in Saudi Arabia and over 12 private ones. The Saudi government pays special attention to education. From 2004 to 2013, the Saudi government spent 321 billion US dollars on education, including establishing 24 new universities and dedicating 25.5% to education (Sinno, 2013).

Saudi Arabia possesses one of the top education systems in the Middle East, and it is consistently growing to catch up with the world's education systems and even compete with them. According to the QS ranking of world universities, Saudi Arabia houses 23 universities among the top 100 universities in the Middle East, seven universities are ranked in the QS world ranking, and the Saudi education system is in 36th place in the education systems in the world (GMI, 2022). Also, Saudi Arabia has the world's largest women-only university, which is Princess Nora Bint Abdul Rahman University in the city of Riyadh. The university has more than 37,000 students and a capacity of 60,000 students. The quality of education in Saudi Arabia has attracted students from other countries to come and study in Saudi Arabia.

3.1. Pull Factors for International Students

There are some robust factors that pull international students to study in Saudi Arabia. According to Suleiman (2021), the top pull factors include the following:

- **World University Ranking:** Several of the Saudi universities offer world-class education, and many of the universities are highly ranked by the well-received QS university ranking.

- **Scholarships:** The education system and the government in Saudi Arabia is generous when it comes to awarding scholarships to international students. These scholarships come with a competitive package that includes stipend, insurance, and the like. More details about the scholarships are given in a later section in this paper.
- **Low Tuition:** Those students who could not get a scholarship are not required to hurt their pockets or bank accounts or loan an unbearable amount of money to pay tuition and fees. The average tuition is \$5000 (five thousand USD) per school year.
- **Availability of Different Majors:** Unlike what might be perceived about Saudi Arabia, the country offers different majors including business administration, computer science, engineering, natural sciences, medical sciences, etc.
- **Diversity:** Saudi Arabia has successfully attracted many employees from many different countries around the world. International students—regardless of their country of origin or the language they speak—will find people who come from the same country, speak the same language, or have similar beliefs or cultures.
- **Cost of Living:** Saudi Arabia is not an expensive country to live in. Things like housing, medications, transportation, and food are all affordable. They are not comparable to the prices in the USA or Canada.

While Sulieman (2021) successfully detailed six pulls that attract international students to study in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, I argue that three more reasons are worth mentioning and can be strong pulls to international students as well.

First: Opportunities for Employment. Saudi Arabia is a country that employs millions of international employees. Being in Saudi Arabia and studying there make it relatively easy for international students to secure jobs upon their graduation. Income in Saudi Arabia is tax-free, and many positions come with competitive packages that attract international workforce.

Second: Returning Scholars. Saudi Arabia is one of the countries that send their students to learn, gain knowledge, and be trained in countries like the USA, Canada, and European countries. According to the Open Report produced by IIE (Institute of International Education, based in the USA), in 2022, Saudi Arabia is one of the top countries that send their students to study in the USA. The following table shows the number of Saudi Arabian students who study in the USA in the last nine years and the change in number (IIE, 2022)

Academic year	Number of students	Change
2021/2022	18,206	-17.0%
2020/2021	21,933	-29.2
2019/2020	30,957	-16.5
2018/2019	37,080	-16.5
2017/2018	44,432	-15.5
2016/2017	52,611	-14.2
2015/2016	61,287	2.2

2014/2015	59,945	11.2
2013/2014	53,919	21.0
2012/2013	44,566	30.5

Table 2: Saudi Students in the USA in the Past Nine Years.

As per the table above, thousands of Saudi students are graduates and training students. Many of those students, upon returning to Saudi Arabia, become professors at the Saudi universities. They contribute to developing the Saudi education system and deliver world-competitive education.

Academic Level	Total
Undergraduate	8,649
Graduate	6,717
Training (Non-Degree & OPT (Optional Practical Training))	2840

Table 3: Saudi Students in the USA by Academic Level in 2021/2022.

Third, Religion. It is known that Saudi Arabia houses the Muslims' two most Holy Masjids (mosques): Makkah and Madinah. To all Muslims, these two houses of Allah are highly appreciated, valued, and respected. The first one, Makkah, represents the Qibla of Muslims. It is the point at which all Muslims around the world turn to in order to perform their prayers. It also is the place where Muslims have to perform Hajj (pilgrimage) once a life for those who are financially and physically capable. The second masjid is where Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is buried. He is the most respected individual for Muslims. Many international students in Saudi Arabia, regardless of their origins, are Muslims and enjoy the privilege of studying in Saudi Arabia by being close to these two Holy Masjids.

3.2.Scholarships

Scholarships are one of the major pulls to international students to come study in the country. Saudi Arabia offers an abundance of scholarships to international students. These scholarships are unique because they offer the following (Sinno, 2013):

- Housing
- Flight tickets
- Medical insurance for students and their families
- Monthly stipends during the study and after graduation
- Faculty and staff support
- Awards for high-achieving students

3.3.International Students Countries of Origin

According to the report of international students, the total number of international students studying in Saudi Arabia for the year 2021/2022, who receive scholarships, has exceeded 35000

students, and they come from over 150 countries around the world. The majority of these students are males. While there are 24 universities in Saudi Arabia, the majority of these students study at one of the following five universities: King Abdulaziz University (Jeddah city), Islamic University of Madinah (Madinah city), Umm Al-Qura University (Makkah city), King Saud University (Riyadh city), and Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (Riyadh city).

Those international students need a way of communicating with their families and the people around them. Nowadays, since social media has become popular, it has gained the attention of international students in Saudi Arabia to use it, too, for communication and socialization purposes.

4. Use and Impact of Social Media

Social media has gained popularity in the world due to the easiness of its use and the social bridges it provides (Alsurehi & Youbi, 2014). Social media makes sharing information accessible between people (Baruah, 2012), and it is one of the internet privileges that include blogs, emails, and instant messages (Broughton, Higgins, Hicks, & Cox, 2009). One of the key influences of social media platforms is that it has successfully attracted younger generations (Baruah, 2012). Users of social media can choose the content they want to interact with (Dellarocas, 2003), exchange ideas (ideas (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011), share information ((Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013), and engage in different activities (Cao et al., 2016).

4.1. Impact on Individuals and Society

Social media reinforces online socialization, which can have an impact on human behavior (Greitemeyer & Osswald, 2011). Also, another influence social media is having on people and societies is that it keeps people updated with technological advances in society (Makki & Chang, 2015). On the professional level, social media permits professionals to support their careers and keep connected with other professionals in the fields, as in the case of LinkedIn (Chen, 2011). This helps professionals to increase their cross-cultural competencies because fields include professionals from different cultural backgrounds. Such ability to gain information about other cultures makes it easier to connect with people who belong to those cultural backgrounds.

However, nothing comes with benefits only. Scholars discuss the drawbacks that the internet—including social media—has on individuals and societies. These include addiction, cybercrimes, harassment, a decline in productivity, and waste of time (Amiel & Sargent, 2004). Anonymity and accuracy are two drawbacks that are related to cross-cultural competency since if information delivered on other cultures is biased or not accurate, that can lead to unwanted outcomes when communicating cross-culturally. Information shared on social media platforms can be hard to verify (Fuchs, 2017). The concept of accuracy is questionable when an individual is in the social media world (Castillo, Mendoza, & Poblete, 2011). It is also not feasible to identify the true identity of the post owner. False information shared on social can negatively affect people about whom inaccurate information is shared (Castillo et al., 2011).

It is evident now that the preferable method of communication has shifted from newspapers and TV to social media, for the majority of people (Alharthi, 2022). With social media, the borders between countries and nations have disappeared, and people can easily get in touch with each other (Darwish & Lakhtaria, 2011). Some of the impact of social media, as scholars talk about it, include moving relationships from physical settings into a virtual mode (Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009); forming student groups for the sake of study (Mao, 2014); and facilitating businesses, marketing, and advertising (Dreher, 2014). The language used in media can harm those who belong to other cultures or believe in other religions than the mainstream (Yacoub, 2022). Social media remains popular with all these benefits and drawbacks, especially in Saudi Arabia.

4.2.Social Media in Saudi Arabia

Social media platforms are popular in Saudi Arabia (Yusuf, Al-Madah, & Alam, 2016). Saudis are among the most active users of social media in the Middle East, according to Templin (2012). More than 90% of people living in Saudi Arabia possess phones (Alsenaidy & Ahmad, 2012). Saudis are ranked third in the world in using smartphones, according to Makki & Chang, 2015. This would point out that the majority of Saudis have access to the internet and social media. Saudis are among the most nations that use Twitter (SSM, 2014; Yusuf et al., 2016; Vinaya, 2013). The use of Facebook has, also, increased largely (Aljasir, Woodcock, & Harrison, 2014; Mao, 2014). Most recently, more than 90% of the people living in Saudi Arabia use social media on a daily basis in 2022. On average, people in Saudi Arabia spend three hours on social media.

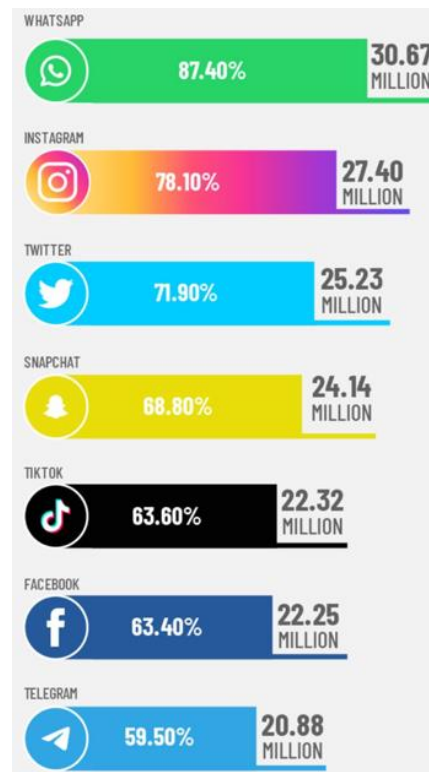


Figure 2: Top Seven Social Media Platforms Used in KSA. Source: Global Media Insights, 2022

5. Cross Cultural Competency

The term ‘cross-cultural competency’ is broad; however, in this study, cross-cultural competency is used to refer to multiple cultures that exist in one place like international students who come from different countries around the world and represent different cultural backgrounds, but they exist in one place, the Saudi environment. Cross-cultural competency is a vital element for international relations (Wang, Freeman, & Zhu, 2013). This competency may lead to the success or failure of many relations (Pausenberger & Nöcker, 2000). Wang et al. (2013) argued that it is important that cross-cultural competency exists so communication can be facilitated in a better way.

6. Research Question and Hypotheses

This study attempts to find answers to the following questions

RQ: In Saudi universities, is there a relationship between social media use and cross-cultural competency among international students?

Under this research question, there are three hypotheses:

H1.1: There is a difference in cross-cultural competency among students based on the amount of time they spend on social media.

H1.2: There is a difference in cross-cultural competency among students based on their level of interaction with global content on social media.

7. Methodology

An online, self-administered survey¹, hosted by the Qualtrics platform, was utilized to collect the data from international students who study in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The survey used in this study does not include any information that could help identify the participants. So, it is anonymous and secure. The content and focus of the survey were about the use of social media in terms of time spent and interaction with global content.

7.1. Population and Subjects

The subjects in this study come from the population of international students who study at any university in Saudi Arabia. The main characteristic of this targeted population was that they come from different countries and cultural backgrounds and that they study in Saudi Arabia. The population also included students who represent different majors and education levels.

¹ The entire survey can be obtained from the researcher upon requesting it.

7.2. Variables and Measurements

In this study, three major variables are used, two independent and one dependent. The two independent variables are interaction with global content on social media and time spent on social media. The one dependent variable is the level of cross-cultural competency. In this section, each of these variables is introduced and defined.

7.2.1. Cross-Cultural Competency

In this study, the variables were defined as follows, based on the definitions of cross-cultural competency as in Hofstede (2001), Haines et al. (2000), Apud et al. (2003), and Johnson, Lenartowicz, and Apud (2006):

- a) The tendency and practice of learning about other cultures including languages, holidays, traditions, tastes, etc.
- b) The tendency to prefer and feel comfortable working and interacting with individuals who come from and represent other cultures.
- c) The ability to adapt to living in other cultures with no consistent fears and worries.
- d) The ability to establish good relationships with people from other cultures.

7.2.2. Interaction with Global Content

According to Sawyer (2011), global content informs the viewers about other cultures, not theirs, presenting new or reinforcing existing information. Chen (2005) argued that global content supports intercultural bridges and reinforces effective communication between diverse people. In this study, the questionnaire asked about 'interaction' with global, referring to the fact that the research participant would read it, watch it (if it is a video), like it, comment on it, understand it, and/or share it.

7.2.3. Time Spent on Social Media

Time spent on social media, an independent variable, measures the time that the participants spend using social media every day. The question provided four response groups: Less than 1 hour a day, 1 to 3 hours a day, 4 to 6 hours a day, or more than 6 hours per day.

7.3. Procedures

The researcher followed the following procedures to conduct the study.

7.3.1. The Instrument

The instrument was designed to measure the relationship between the use of social media and cross-cultural competency in international students in Saudi Arabia. The survey was divided into three major parts. Part one, demographics, asked about country of origin, gender, age, marital status, first language, education, current university, and years spent in Saudi Arabia. The second

part of the survey asked about the use of social media. This part is divided into three subsections: time spent on social media, type of social media used (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, etc.), and type of content (global or local). The third part of the survey asks about cross-cultural competency.

7.3.2. Instrument Validity

The instrument used in this study was validated through jury validity. Jury validity is a process of “having a group of experts in the subject matter examine a measurement device to judge its merits” (p. 435), according to Reinard (2001).

7.3.3. Subject Recruitment and Contact

A snowball method was used in this study to recruit participants. Katz (2006) defines snowball sampling as “a special nonprobability method used for developing a research sample where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances” (p. 4). The researcher, through personal associations, sent the link to the survey with a participation invitation to 20 professional colleagues working in universities in Saudi Arabia. Those professional colleagues were asked to start snowballing the survey to their international students. To ensure the privacy of the participants, no identifiable information was collected, and the completion of the survey was voluntary. The first question in the survey was consent to be accepted by the participants before they decided to proceed to the survey itself. In the consent, the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point by just existing the survey. The participants were also given the contact information of the researcher in case they had any questions or concerns. After data had been collected, descriptive statistics was used to show and discuss the results. The study findings are presented below.

8. Findings and Discussions

The first few questions asked the participants about their demographics as shown in the tables below. However, before the demographic questions could be reached by the participants, they were asked two screening questions: The first one was if they were willing to participate and the second one was if they use social media. If participants answered yes to both questions, they would be taken to the rest of the questions.

Age	Count
18-25	103
26-30	18
Above 30	13

Table 4: Age of the participants

Gender	Count
Male	121
Female	7
No answer	6

Table 5: Gender of the participants

Status	Count
Single	101
Married	27
Others	6

Table 6: Marital status of the participants

Duration	Count
Less than a year	13

1-3	83
3-5	25
More than 5 years	13

Table 7: How many years in Saudi Arabia?

Country	Count
Algeria	4
Angola	3
Bahrain	4
Bangladesh	10
Benin	4
Cameroon	3
Cape Verde	5
Central African Republic	3
China	9
Comoros	4
Congo	4
Egypt	5
Gambia	3
India	4
Indonesia	9
Jordan	4
Kazakhstan	5
Malaysia	5
Mali	3
Nigeria	6
Senegal	4
Other countries	33

Table 8: Which country are you from?

University	Count
King Abdelaziz University	61
Islamic University in Madinah	31
UMM AL-Qura University	24
King Saud University	6

Imam Muhammad bin Saud University	2
Others	10

Table 9: Participants' university of study in Saudi Arabia

Degree	Count
Arabic Institute	3
Bachelor's (4 years)	118
MA	4
PhD	2
Others	7

Table 10: Participants' current degree

Language	Study	Home
Arabic	71	39
English	46	45
Others	N/A	46
Ignored the question	17	4

Table 11: Language of study and home

As seen in the above tables (4-10), the participants' demographics were shown. Most of the participants' age category is 18-25 (103 participants), most of them are single (101 participants), most of them are males (121 participants), and most of them have been in Saudi Arabia for more than a year (121 participants). The other tables show the rest of the demographic questions and answers. Table 8 shows the country of origin, table 9 shows the university the participants study at, and tables 10 & 11 show the languages used at the university and at home by the participants.

The second part of the survey questions was about using social media. One hundred and five (105) participants indicated that they have more than three social media accounts on different social media platforms. The statistical results of these platforms were as follow, Snapchat (106), WhatsApp (103), Facebook (100), Instagram (99), TikTok (97), YouTube (84), and Twitter (75). This question was about possessing an account on these social media platforms. For example, those that said YouTube meant that they have accounts on YouTube, but it is most definitely expected that the vast majority of the participants, if not all of them, watch YouTube regardless of having an account on it or not.

When it comes to the information that the participants include in their social media profiles, the results were the following: contact information (95), real name (91), interests (87), traditions and cultures (86), personal photos (78), religion (76), daily activities (74), and personal videos (67). As for the number of friends participants have on social media accounts, 22 participants said they have 50 to 100 friends, 36 participants said that they have 100-300 friends, 23 participants reported having 300 to 500 friends, and 34 participants say that they have more than 500 friends. Regarding the question that asks about the time spent on using social media, 77 participants reported spending more than three hours daily on their social media accounts, and 39 participants reported spending less than three hours on social media daily. These numbers indicate high levels of presence on social media and indicate the willingness of the participants to have a tendency for cross-cultural competency. Regarding the purposes participants use social media for, the following were reported:

- To find information about general topics (113 responses),
- To find information about other cultures (106 responses),
- To communicate with classmates in their university (105 responses),
- To find information about their classmates (99 responses),
- To make new friends (100 responses)
- To post about their culture and beliefs (69 responses)

As for the global content—content that reinforces intercultural dialogues and aims at promoting effective communication and understanding among diverse people—most participants (117 who responded to this question of multiple statements) indicated interaction with global content.

Statements	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Number of responses
I read posts and/or participate in discussions on social media about other cultures.	91%	9%	1%	0%	0%	117
I feel comfortable dealing with classmates from other cultures.	79%	11%	2%	6%	3%	117

I am eager to learn about the country in which I study/work, when it is not my country.	96%	4%	0%	0%	0%	117
I am interested in socializing with my classmates who come from different cultural backgrounds.	87%	8%	4%	0%	1%	117
I am able to greet people from other cultures the way they do in their own culture.	74%	12%	8%	5%	1%	117
Some of my classmates from other cultures have become my friends outside of university.	79%	15%	2%	3%	2%	117
My relations with people from other cultures don't always long last.	79%	10%	6%	3%	3%	117
I use social media to increase my knowledge about the cultures of my classmates.	88%	7%	3%	2%	0%	117
I believe that there are essential differences between cultures.	95%	3%	3%	0%	0%	117
I accept friend requests on social media from people who belong to other cultures.	78%	7%	9%	3%	3%	117
I always try to educate myself about the culture of my classmates to avoid any miscommunication.	90%	5%	2%	3%	1%	117
I don't encounter miscommunication when I deal with people from other culture.	75%	9%	3%	9%	3%	117

Table 12: Interaction with global content

As for the last question on the survey, “Do you think using social media has improved/increased your understanding of Saudi culture?” 113 respondents said “yes,” and four respondents chose “maybe.”

Based on the survey responses, the research question and hypotheses can now be answered. As for the research question “In Saudi universities, is there a relationship between social media use and cross-

cultural competency among international students?” the answer is a definite yes. Since this study uses descriptive statistics, this answer is based on the survey responses in which the participants reported having been using social media, owning multiple social media accounts on different platforms, and spending multiple hours daily on using social media. The answer to the research question can also be confirmed by the participants’ responses to the questions that asked them about their interaction with global content on social media. As for the research hypothesis one, “H1.1: There is a difference in cross-cultural competency among students based on the amount of time they spend on social media,” the answer is yes. The more time participants spend on social media, the more cross-culture competent they become. As for the second research hypothesis, “H1.2: There is a difference in cross-cultural competency among students based on their level of interaction with global content on social media.” The answer is also yes. The more interaction with global content happens with the participants, the more cross-cultural competent they become. This applies to all the participants who responded to the survey questions.

9. Conclusion

This study investigated the role of social media in helping international students in Saudi Arabia develop cross-cultural competency. Currently, over 50 thousand international students who represent 159 countries around the world study in Saudi Arabia in higher education institutions in different. This influx of students represents different cultural backgrounds. Most of those international students study in one of these five universities: King Abdelaziz University in Jeddah, Islamic University in Madinah, Umm Al-Qura University in Makkah, King Saudi University in Riyadh, and Imam Muhammad bin Saud University in Riyadh as well (the capital city). The study used a survey, through Qualtrics Platform, that snowballed into potential participants, all of whom are international students in Saudi Arabia. A total number of 134 participants successfully completed the survey (121 males, 7 females, 1 preferred not to mention, and 5 ignored the question). The results of the study indicate that social media plays a crucial and significant role when it comes to the impact of social media on the participants’ cross-cultural competency, conditioning that they own social media accounts, spend some time daily on social media, and interact with global content. This study has some limitations including the number of participants, the survey questions, the quantitative method, and the descriptive analysis. More research that studies other international students and uses different qualitative or mixed methods is encouraged to yield more responses. The study also concludes that more research is direly needed on the population of international students in Saudi Arabia as this population deserves more research-focused attention. Also, more research on female international students is suggested since the majority of the participants were males. Regardless of these limitations of the study, this research should be a cornerstone in the Saudi library since it opens the door for more attention and studies on international students in Saudi Arabia.

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