Is It A Small World After All?
Mapping Intercultural Competence in Computer Mediated Communication Users in Spanish Campus

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ABSTRACT

The use of computer-mediated communication has led researchers to contradictory argumentations on information and communication technology (ICT) influences on users’ engagement in their societal concern. The present study was focused on exploring the intercultural communication competence in terms of developmental model of intercultural sensitivity in netizens among Spanish college students. For this purpose, a pilot study was given to 64 volunteered respondents in order to assess comprehensiveness of a survey questionnaire dealing with popular conceptions of intercultural competence. After some minor adjustment and refinement, the improved questionnaire was used as instrument for research in which 398 university student participants were recruited to participate. Finding data were used to map the way the participants’ intercultural competencies are positioned. Moreover, some significant regression coefficient outcomes were fitted into models in attempt to examine direct and indirect effect produced on internet ICT users’ intercultural competence produced by the prediction and mediation variables considered for analysis in the present research.

Keywords: Communication, Development of Intercultural Sensitivity, Effect, ICT, Intercultural Competence, Internet, Social Networking

1. INTRODUCTION

Internet use is widely seen as the engine that swaps the way we look at the world, people, and the relationships amongst human beings. Apart from massive movements of people across the globe, current globalization- characterized mainly by continuous technological breakthroughs in timeless and borderless communication- portrays the dynamic changes in the way people use media and interact with each other. The use of the www today not only covers people’s need of being informed and entertained, but also enables users to work, to buy and sell, including to participate in political events as well as to be connected with friends, the significant others and even with strangers from every corner of the world. As Internet has
become a tool, particularly, for young people to create and maintain a virtual community that brings about information regarding peers in other places and cultures, it fosters the perception of apparent one-world closeness among inhabitants living on this planet by means of effective advanced information communication technologies. Thus, it cannot be ignored that, the world has developed into a huge virtually functioning community for an ever-increasing number of people who interact within this new milieu on an everyday-life basis. As part of it, people need, to a certain extent, to develop strategies to relate or, at least, come to term with other cultural groups. Hence, in many educational contexts worldwide, younger generations are encouraged to take advantages by viewing the world from various perspectives with an innovative mindset consisting of attitudes, expectations toward/consideration for individual and cultural differences or diversities—ideas that are articulated as intercultural awareness or sensitivity. However, when it comes to considering how teachers can better educate students in this increasingly diverse society, Olson and Kroeger (2001) point out that we are not necessarily educated to perceive this global interconnectedness nor have we been educated to make life choices with full awareness of the global implications for our preferences (p. 116). These authors suggest the need for developing skills to cope and address this matter in order to live in the complex intercultural world where it is getting more and more usual to encounter people from different cultures, and with whom we may face differences in behaviors, viewpoints, and styles of communicating.

By looking into the European Union (EU) context, we can learn that the issue of minorities remains a major political, societal, and economic challenge for its member states. Over the 2007 speech, the president of the EU Commission, Mr. Barroso, stated, “Today’s strategy promoting intercultural understanding confirms culture’s place at the heart of our policies”. The EU recognizes that culture and diversity are vital elements to its member countries’ economies and competitiveness as well as its international relations with third countries (Constant et al., 2008). In order to address intercultural issues in the EU, in May 2007, the Commission proposed three objectives: 1) cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; 2) culture as a catalyst for creativity; and 3) culture as a key component in international relations. This discourse line was followed at several subsequent forums such as the Lisbon Strategy, “equal opportunities for all” at the European years 2007, “intercultural dialogue” in 2008, and “creativity and innovation” manifesto in 2009 (http://create2009.europa.eu/fileadmin/Content/Downloads/PDF/Manifesto/manifesto.en.pdf), they all stress the need for the EU’s commitment to diversity and intercultural cooperation.

In spite of all those discourses out of political goodwill, researchers in a wide corpus of studies (for example, Igartua et al, 2013; Igartua et al, 2012; González & Flores, 2011; Cea D’Ancona & Valles, 2010; Igartua & Cheng, 2009) have evidenced the persisting existence of ethnic stereotyping and racial prejudices, no matter are they manifest or latent. In this sense, researchers draw special attention to “acceptance” and “empathy” that are regarded commonly as the main keys among other strategies in order to live harmoniously in an increasingly globalized world where constant human migration movements and intercultural encounters are taking place. Their view is feasible, particularly, in a society capable of taking advantage of technology that enables its members to establish and cultivate relationships mediated by computer. Bearing this idea in mind, the broad interest in the present study is focused on exploring and mapping the developmental stage of intercultural awareness and perception of cultural others or ethnic minorities in social network users among college students in Spain. Lastly, causal models are analyzed in attempt to examine relations between considered variables.
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