

# Understanding Cyberculture from Perspective of Intercultural Communication

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## ABSTRACT

With the widespread use of digital devices and social media, communication happened in digital space has become an important research area. Based on McLuhan's concept of "global village", cyberspace gathered people from different countries and also record communication at different times. Furthermore, when different people are utilizing online social networking, intercultural communication in cyberspace and the cyber culture in various social media platforms become a new area to explore. This paper adopted the method of literature review, the articles, and books are from the university database retrieval, aims to understand how scholars seek the form of cyberculture and the development of intercultural communication in the dynamic digital environment.

**Keywords:** *cyberculture, cyberspace, intercultural communication, digital space, social networking*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of technology, the Internet brings a lot of conveniences towards people's communication. Online communication assists people to break the limitation of geographic location and temporality, and also it makes a great contribution to global communication. Users have the opportunity to access information quickly and interact with others. Especially, social media as a forefront tool of current technology provides a platform for abundant communication and cultural diversity. McLuhan (1964) states that the medium is the message, technology reconstructed human work furthermore changes people's relations with one another, technology changes the pattern and scales of human affairs [1]. Furthermore, McLuhan pointed out the concept of "global village", the visual and communication technology combined the information created in a different time and space and structure into one digital entirety, which is treated as a "global village" [2]. Based on McLuhan's opinion, digital communication channels build electronic networks, when people are using multiple digital media to communicate. Cyberspace maintains instantaneous and real-time relationships with different people and places which unite separate individuals into one huge global family.

About two decades ago, Herring (1996) states that intercultural communication has received more attention

since computer networks and intercultural communication occurs more easily and frequently than traditional face-to-face communication [3]. While a large number of people from various countries using digital media to share information, cyberspace provides a new environment for understanding intercultural communication and multiculturalism. Moreover, Robson and Stasiewicz-Biekowska (2014) mentioned an assumption that the Internet mediates communication can facilitate intercultural exchange and understanding [4]. Communication happened online to become a new field to research culture, especially when multiple cultures are gathered on a digital platform, the interaction and user's behavior are worthy to explore. Pereira (2017) explained the concept, cyberculture, which is cultural communication through technology devices, the communication contains cultural behaviors in a network; and also, the cultural influence and control of communication in this network [5]. Moreover, when users from various cultures interact online, people's differentiation and reflection upon space offer a new understanding of intercultural communication and negotiation of foreign culture in the online space [4]. Thus, this research aims to understand cyberculture from the perspective of intercultural and explore how intercultural communication develops in the digital environment.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Digital Environment

Digital interactive systems radically make changes to people's cognitive capacities, digital culture became a new notion that changes the conditions of existence for different cultures. Although the virtual world and the real-world have a clear boundary, reality has also been transformed into information space. In the research of digital culture, Uzelac (2008) mentioned that information contents are cultural products since information is a part of a society's cultural fabric and reflection [6]. Information and communication technologies (ICT) provides a platform that allows different cultures to interact, which are not tools that allow people to share information, but it is a space on the interface. And also Robson (2014) mentioned the expansion of digital information and communication technologies around the world at an unprecedented speed and represents opportunities for social and cultural breakthroughs from the original location [7].

With the development of digital culture, Robson (2014) pointed out that in the culture saturated with digital ICTs, users are not only conscious and controlling the production of content, but also remain under the influence massively succumbing to the rules of technologies and adapting to the interfaces, further experience a modify of their sensory capacities [7]. Moreover, Robson (2014) pointed out the features and benefits of digital place, cultural difference is negotiated through the digital place of social media, which allows individuals to both expose themselves to new things on cyberspace while significantly keep the same in real-life [7]. Also, Hepp (2015) mentioned the media cultures are cultures characterized by mediatization and digitalization, the mediatized space gathered those fragments of multiple societies in media cultures [8].

However, Robson also pointed out a critical opinion of digital space. Beyond the surface of communication convenience made by social media, many respondents in Robson's research express a sort of feeling about "Reduction", which means the contracted of digital space and simplified nature of online communication compared to face-to-face communication, because the version of the self displayed on social media is reduced, calculated, and unreal [7]. Robson (2014) further explained the reduction through an example of Facebook. On Facebook, users can plan everything, even if people are chatting with someone [7]. When someone asking a question, users don't have to respond straight away, they can just plan their answer and chose a proper time to respond [7].

### 2.2. Intercultural Communication

Uzelac (2008) mentioned among the important

issues of the digital dimension is the sharing of knowledge. Under globalization, the sharing of information involves cross countries [6]. Zachara (2014) talked about one new area on the digital network is the "storytellers", which means the individuals who can attract other users through creating their own narratives. The storytellers do not need to be celebrities, they can be normal people who share life, experience, and thoughts. Their storytelling can lead to people's emotional involvement, under the circumstance of globalization, their story also reflects the intentions and worldview of a certain culture or country [9].

Chen (2017) pointed out that intercultural communication competence was seen as an important goal in real-life communication before [10]. Different from the traditional intercultural communication by immigrants, the Internet, and computer-mediated technologies offer a new field to explore intercultural communication in the digital context. In Chen's research, the author conducted a qualitative study to examine the Facebook posts of an international student who was from China and studied in the US. The research found out since the accessibility of social networking, users build relationships with the audiences across cultures through their posts. Also through authentic interaction on social media, intercultural knowledge is constructed with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds [10].

Based on computer-mediated communication, people's interaction happens in a broader international area. The platform provides the opportunity for cross-cultural engagement, users can touch with people from different cultural backgrounds in widely separated geographical locations. In addition, Hepp (2015) pointed out an idea of "phenomena of thickening" towards culture on digital media [8]. Many cultural patterns that occur empirically are characteristic of different cultures, or that they can be found in one way or another in different cultures. Consequently, cultures flow into one another, and their borders become blurred. Uzelac (2008) pointed out that ICT and digital networks are a necessary foundation that supports the development of globalization and is used to support global markets and production processes, also, the digital networks can be seen as a central control which coordination over-dispersed units. On the other side, digital networking is a communication tool, not only used by citizens, but also activists, and NGOs as it facilitates efficient and far-reaching communication on a large scale [6]. From the perspective of countries, Cyberspace is widely used to help the image-building of societies or groups and to separate a variety of information global [9].

One example is Wechat which was studied by Waliczko, besides the study of the role of communication on social media, it pointed out the

cyberculture of e-commerce on Wechat, especially in China. In the study, Waliczko (2020) discussed the “online shopping culture” combined with the development of social media. The function of transfer money on Wechat in 2013 offers the foundation of online shopping culture, users can transfer money to other individuals or transfer it to a company. Moreover, many companies registered the online shop on the Wechat application, the easy-access layout of the online shop and payment makes WeChat became a perfect platform for online trade [11]. The culture of shopping is an irreversible process that changes the mentality and habits of people, Thus Waliczko (2020) stated that moving shopping malls to virtual reality is the trend of the future [11]. Focus on the perspective of intercultural communication, Waliczko (2020) talked about Wechat has huge potential for expansion to other countries as a social media of communication and commercial and owns the biggest players in the social media market in the Asia-Pacific region. Since the strong users base of Wechat in China Wechat can be seen as a representation of Chinese cyberculture. Non-Chinese people who interact with Chinese users have a certain extent obligation to download the app in order to contact their friends or clients [11]. Thus, intercultural communication forms in the usage of non-Chinese users and the interaction between them.

### ***2.3 Minority Cultures on Social Media***

Besides the broad intercultural communication between countries, intercultural also occurs in certain marginalized groups. The cyberculture on social media allows people have opportunities to know the culture of minorities. Focusing on cyberculture, Clark (2020) pointed out that social media is a source to build an online community further to gather users who belong to the same cultural group. This research mainly focuses on the culture of the minority group on Twitter and states that social media has become a useful tool for developing networks of emotional, social, and even scholarly support. Through an ethnographic study of the hashtag about black society on Twitter, Clark concluded that Twitter as a digital platform of microblogging, allows individuals to post messages to audiences of hundreds of thousands [12]. The hashtags and posts use to draw the attention of people who do not know the culture or event. Such as the Black digital culture, since the number of users who are colored more than the white people, through the strength of user numbers, colored people influenced digital discourse through interactions, hashtags, pictures, pithy phrases, memes, and gifs that provided real-time experiences of their own life and let others know their background and circumstances in the U.S. society [12].

Another ethnography research about cyberculture by Atay (2021) focused on the queer culture in cyberspace

[13]. Atay (2021) mentioned people live in a digitalized culture, which is a convergence culture where people’s experiences and technological applications are fused [13]. Atay as a transnational queer describes the personal experience to discuss the digital queer community and the culture. In the research, Atay (2021) recorded the personal experience during the Covid-19 pandemic, he turned to social media networks to interact with the queer community who are dispersed around the world since the pandemic limits people’s physical activity [13]. Atay mentioned he use the social media Tinder to chat with other queer people, with more queer members interact on Tinder, social media forms a space of queer community. As Atay (2021) said, “I found a temporary transnational queer community that I temporarily belonged to. People were miles away, living in temporality, digitally space” [13]. The online communities create a sense of belonging and digital homes to these queer members, and also for building relationships event for romantic. Since social media attracts people from different locations, queer digital communities are transnational; also hence members communicate quickly and easily with other queer people around the world.

Based on Clark and Atay, intercultural communication in cyberspace provides a platform for minority groups, either helping them to connect with people from different places or countries or allow people in different backgrounds to know their culture, further achieve their goal of exposure. Also, cyberculture potential empowerment that these technologies, platforms, and applications offer for the transnational and marginalized groups [13].

### ***2.4 Critique***

Srinivasan (2017) stated a controversy point to McLuhan’s idea of “global village”. First, Srinivasan (2017) pointed out that the “global village” supported by technology is an ideal concept but the truth of digital world is inequality [14]. Although the previous sections discussed the benefit of cyberspace that brings to intercultural communication and the cyber culture encourages interactions in marginalized groups, Srinivasan (2017) mentioned that in the level of cultural communication, technology only reinforces inequality among different people rather than combats it [14]. Srinivasan (2017) provided an example to explain this point, an increasing number of people in developing country are able to use mobile phone, but the technology only offers basic functionality due to interventions of internet connection and intermittent power [14]. Based on this circumstance, the idea of “global” and cultural interaction becomes a strongly exporting of Western values, which caused people ignoring other diverse traditions and beliefs in the world [14].

Secondly, Srinivasan (2017) mentioned, in cyberspace, the content that people viewed can be influenced by the control of data flow, how information ordered and use of technology, which means within today's algorithm and big data climate, the people or institutions who own the best computing and processing power can manipulate the digital space [14]. Thus, some particular cultural values will impose to people from different communities, even empower economic inequality [14]. Furthermore, the inequality of cyberspace cannot simply consider the dimension of continental geographies, but related to who gains greater interest through manipulating networks. Srinivasan (2017) pointed out the situation that people who can access to the digital information tends to offer better economic opportunities than people were completely disconnected [14]. When a community unable to participant the connectivity on cyberspace, which will cause the marginalized group more marginalize.

### 3. CONCLUSION

From several decades ago, communication through technologies has been a significant topic to study, especially under the development of globalization, digital culture has become an important research area. Since the dynamic changes in digital space, the process of intercultural communication in cyberspace, and the unique cyberculture on social media reflect how digital devices modify people's lives and provide a new direction for social-cultural communication. After McLuhan pointed out the concept of a "global village" based on technologies communication, researchers pay attention to global communication and cyberspace from various perspectives. Uzelac and Robson state that technologies offered an opportunity to share information and express cultures; and also discussed the ways of communication changes in people's life. Further, As Chen and Waliczko mentioned that social networking application provides a platform for people to understand other country's cultures, also to present the users' own culture. Besides the cultures in the level of nations, the minority culture group also reflect their own culture on cyberspace and in virtue of social media to interact with others, such as the research by Atay and Clark. Overall, this paper studies the development of cyberculture and how digital technologies help with intercultural communication across countries and different societies. The digital communication and the culture formed on several platforms encouraged the user's connection without the constraints of time and space. While Srinivasan pointed out several critiques about cultural communication on digital space which include the digital inequality and intensify the marginalized position to the groups who are unable to access digital space. The cyberspace that build by technology and the cyber culture that created by users' interactions and

behaviours still promote intercultural communication between several communities and countries.

### AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Xiaoyu Ming.

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