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# **Global Acculturation: A Mixed Methods Study of the Socio-Cultural Implications of Social Media Platforms Focusing on Facebook and Instagram**

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## **Abstract**

The era of globalization has led to major changes in the ways that societies and countries work together and develop, and, as such, theories and speculations of the implications of cross-cultural phenomena has been thriving. Begun in the 1930s, the study of acculturation became a foundational aspect of cross-cultural research. As globalization became more prevalent, so did the implications of acculturation. With globalization and the rise of digital media, social media became a crucial part of cross-cultural relationships. This study seeks to examine the connection between acculturation and social media in the formation of a new global phenomenon: Global Acculturation. The research makes use of a mixed-methods approach by including surveys and interviews, of which the main empirical supplementation is within the interviews going in-depth into the socio-cognitive and cultural implications of our use of social media. With the help of a theoretical framework based on the theory of Acculturation by Sam and Berry (2010) and Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication (2001), the study presents a new element to the current acculturative process: Through empirical and theoretical analysis, the study finds social media has become the main medium through which acculturation is processed globally. The study also argues that the social media platforms take part in the process as socio-cultural entities, and not just as a tool for the expansion of traditional cultures. Future work is recommended to include different methodological approaches such as observation, as well as broadening the scope of the data to include more respondents.

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# 1. Introduction

'Culture' is a very abstract concept that has been analyzed within different fields and from different perspectives. Culture is a concept that embraces all the parts and patterns that make us part of a nation, a group, or a family. Humans use culture as a tool to adapt to whichever reality that they find themselves in (Schultz and Lavenda 2014, 23). Yet, culture is not rigid and will always change as we move around in the world and come into contact with different cultures. On this, there has been many researchers studying the implications of movement and connection between cultures, resulting in theoretical understandings such as Acculturation.

The concept of acculturation is also not a new term to add to cultural studies. Many researchers have tried to find correlations between acculturation and different variables such as traditional media, schooling, etc. Acculturation is becoming more and more relevant and is a part of most people's lives in one way or another: More and more people get into biracial or bilingual relationships, or move to countries where they have kids who grow up bilingual, etc. There are also more extraordinary circumstances such as refugee crises. These are all factors that have a big effect on the social and cultural aspects of both the individual as well as the society. At the time of this research, we are also going through the global pandemic of Covid-19. This pandemic has meant that more and more contact has been moved online: Workers work from home, students take their exams via online video, and friends and relatives move their celebrations to Skype or Facetime, etc.

As the world has become more global and people are moving more easily between countries, another thing that has become a major part of most individuals' lives is the addition of social media. Social media allows us to stay in contact with our friends and families even though you are not physically near each other. Social media allows individuals to cross borders without actually leaving their home. Every day, people are introduced to new trends from different places of the world and partake in challenges that transcends cultural norms. Different theoretical and social implications have already been analyzed in current literature when it comes to social media, yet its role as a tool in developing and changing societies' cultural and social norms has remained undeveloped as seen in the literature review (cf. chapter 2).



The fact that trends are constantly changing can have an impact on the fluidity of cultural and social values within societies (on- and offline). The way that we understand growth and change will no longer be the same as we move to a social world online. We do not need to wait for new regulations to pass through, for new laws to be made; we are constantly updated with new behaviors, new trends, new everything. – And the more that this happens, the more susceptible we will become to its influences.

Looking at these two very different developments (acculturation and social media) could possibly create an understanding of the two's common and interchangeable development. – Making a possible new concept of '*global acculturation*'.

Based on these considerations and previous literature (cf. chapter 2), I have formulated the following research question.

## 1.1. Research Question

***How does the way we use social media today play a part in the shaping of a global acculturation, and in which ways does this use of social media affect socio-cognitive behaviors of the individual?***

To be able to answer the research question most accurately, it is further supplemented with two supporting research questions to be used as guidance throughout the thesis:

1. What is the primary use of social media platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook?
2. How do users of social media use platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook, in terms of language use, etc.?

The presented research question and supporting questions are based on two main assumptions:

1. Global acculturation is an existing concept though it is missing from current literature.  
Global acculturation is yet to become an established part of existing literature. As indicated in the literature review (cf. chapter 2), current literature focuses on the physical movement of individuals who then, consequently, become parts of minority groups in their respective

host-countries. Global acculturation does not include the physical movement of individuals to be affected by acculturative processes; this happens fluidly by connecting online.

2. Global acculturation exists and expands through the Internet/social media.

An important tool for global acculturation is the Internet. More importantly, this thesis will rely on the assumption that social media is a specifically important platform on the Internet in relation to global acculturation. Social media platforms allow users all over the world to share their personal lives, ideas, worries, and understandings. Because of this, such platforms are deemed to be an excellent tool in sharing cultural and social understandings and behaviors. This leads to an easy connection between people from all over the world and, ultimately, contact between cultures online connecting the theoretical notions of social media with acculturation: A connection which is missing from current literature.

## **1.2. Thesis Structure**

This thesis is divided into 7 main chapters: (1) Introduction, (2) Literature Review (3) Methodology, (4) Theoretical Framework, (5) Analysis, (6) Discussion, and (7) Conclusion.

This structure of the thesis will allow me to logically and systematically go through the different phases and levels of the research.

As a result of the research design (i.e. working both inductively and deductively), the theoretical considerations of this research will have a smaller part in terms of focus as this will only work for reference for conceptualization and understanding socio-cultural implications found in the data collected. Additionally, because of this, the methodology – which will be looking into the data collection – will have a substantially bigger part of this thesis, as the data collected will be the main part of the research. The analysis will focus on the empirical implications deduced from the collected data based on the theoretical framework. Following this, the theoretical implications of the findings will be discussed and presented in chapter 5. Lastly, the conclusion will highlight the main findings and provide an answer for the research question. The chapter will be finished off with suggestions for future research on the topic of global acculturation.

## 2. Literature Review

To understand the current academic stance in terms of a global acculturation (or lack thereof), we have to look into current literature on the matter. The purpose of this literature review will be to familiarize myself with different aspects of cross-cultural theories such as acculturation, cultural flows, and social media. This will help me realize and illustrate any limitations in the current literature in relation to the conceptualization of global acculturation.

In the following sections, such literature in reference to the two cross-cultural theories and social media is presented.

### 2.1. Acculturation and Cultural Flows

In this sub-chapter, I will be looking into the previous and current literature concerning the two cross-cultural theories; Acculturation and Cultural Flows, hoping that they will help enlighten any currently discussed concepts within cross-cultural phenomena.

#### Acculturation

The phenomenon of acculturation was first introduced in the 1930s, and the phenomenon has only become more and more relevant throughout the decades as a result of higher levels of immigration, refugees, and globalization. Acculturation is the process in which individuals and smaller social or ethnic minorities change culturally and psychologically as a result of intercultural contact (Sam and Berry 2010, 472). Historically, acculturation was researched and discussed on a group level, but in the recent decades, acculturative implications on the individual level have also become a part of the literature (Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver 2006, 36). The group level of acculturation has implications on factors such as group customs and economic as well as political life, whereas the individual level alters the personal attitudes, cultural identities, and social behaviors (Berry 2006, 305).

There are different approaches to acculturation such as *stress-and-coping approach*, *social-learning approach*, and *social-cognition approach* (Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver 2006, 37). Especially social-learning approach is interesting in relation to this research as it focuses on the adoption of “culturally appropriate new skills” (i.e. behavioral shifts) (ibid.). Variables that are prevalent in the research within this approach include general knowledge about the host culture, level of difference

between cultures, length of residence in the new country, and amount of contact with nationals of the host country (ibid.).

One of the more prominent and active scholars of acculturation research is John W. Berry (1939-) who presented different theoretical aspects of integration and assimilation in relation to immigration, personality, as well as acculturative stress as a consequence to these. With David L. Sam, Berry discussed acculturative implications with a model depicting the two levels of the process. In this model, Sam and Berry recognize two different levels of the process of acculturation: The group (or cultural) level and the individual (or psychological) level (Sam and Berry 2010, 474). The model is interesting for this research as it connects socio-cognitive implications on the individual level as a result of the cultural changes that individuals go through when moving to new cultures. Such includes the phenomenon of *acculturative stress* which comes as a result of larger behavioral shifts that cause anxiety and stress in the individual (ibid., 474-475).

Another interesting research done on acculturation is by Jae Chul Shim from 1991. The paper titled *"The Role of Mass Media and Intergroup Relations in the Process of Newcomers' Assimilation"* discusses the correlation between **mass communication** and the levels of assimilation of newcomers. The research discusses the implications of mass media in the process of acculturation, although, the research focuses on the ethnic groups assimilation into host-countries' cultures as a result of emigrating to said country. Furthermore, the research focuses only on the role of ethnic media (compared/in relation to host-countries' media) in the process of assimilation: whether or not ethnic mass media hurries or slows the process in relation to acting as a "watch dog" and "guard dog" for the newcomers (Shim 1991, 32-33). Interesting for the understanding of the implications presented in this research, we are able to conclude direct implications of mass media on cultural influence and behavioral shifts. As the research is older, social media was not included, yet it works as an understanding of its possible impact on acculturative processes, as social media is still considered a type of mass media.

## **Cultural Flows**

Another aspect within cross-cultural theories – and closely related to the concept of acculturation – is the concept of **cultural flows** as first presented by Appadurai in 1990. The concept is understood as cultures being fluid as they mix and merge creating different objects, ideas, ideologies, etc. (Appadurai 2015, 233). What is interesting about cultural flows is that it is all about the meeting and combination of different cultural values and behaviors. Although, as we have also seen from other literature, this theory focuses on the physical movement or desire thereof between places with different social or cultural values than one's own. – In this movement, the meeting and combination of cultures does not just move in one direction: Cultures affect each other both ways, so when one moves to a different place, they take a part of that culture with them as well as leave a part of their culture with the new place (Appadurai 1996, 33).

We can see from this first sub-chapter, that the theories concerning cross-cultural implications usually look into the physical movement between countries. It is safe to say that the vast majority of research looking into acculturation are based on subjects such as refugees and immigration (Sam and Berry 2010, 473). For this research, I am interested in the way that we are culturally affected without having to move at all opening up for the discussion of the possible implications of such a conceptualization using social media as its main tool. This leads us to the next aspect, social media, which we will be looking into in the following sub-chapter.

## **2.2. Social Media**

This sub-chapter will look into the theoretical discussions of social media. For my theoretical framework (cf. chapter 4), I will be using Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication (SCT-MC) which focuses on the aspect of mass communication in relation to influenced behavioral shifts. This sub-chapter will be used to help better understand any implications of social media use of which I hope to be able to connect with SCT-MC.

The aspects which will be in focus will be (1) social media on a psychological level, which will look into shifts in behaviors and values as a result of social media use, and (2) language use online.

Social media has become a big part of the lives of most people in the world. Every day, more people join social media platforms (Hootsuite 2020). – They have become the platforms for businesses and relatives alike; to keep contact and to inform. In this chapter, I will be looking into the research that has been done in relation to social media and possible implications of its use. Once again, I hope that this will help me in highlighting any missing aspects from the current literature as well as in understanding possible implications and trends that are already explicated in the current literature which can help me connect this with acculturative processes to conceptualize a global acculturation.

### **Social Media on the Psychological Level**

There is different current literature that looks into the implications of social media on both psychological as well as social levels. Different scholars have looked into the implications of social media use on different aspects including rituals of mourning: This is an example of a research done by Martin Gibbs et al. from 2015 titled: “#Funeral and Instagram: death, social media, and platform vernacular” (Gibbs et al. 2015). In the paper, the researchers look into the ways that people use the social media platform, Instagram, to inform their acquaintances of the deaths of family and friends. The research finds implication of the ways that mourning rituals change on the group level as a result of the use of social media in which practices are “*moving away from formal and institutionalized rituals to informal and personalized, vernacular practices*” (ibid., 255). This is interesting for this research as it confirms that there are social implications on the individual as a result of the way that we use social media. This further confirms the probability of the notion that our use of social media *can* in fact lead to a global acculturation in which the social and cultural values and behaviors will change according to behaviors and values showcased online.

Another research looks into the correlation between the use of social media and personality traits of the users. In their paper; “Using Instagram Picture Features to Predict Users’ Personality” (2015), Bruce Ferwerda, Markus Schedl, and Marko Tkalcic looked into 22,398 uploaded Instagram pictures from 113 participants to try to determine whether or not there is a connection between certain personality traits and the filters that people used on their pictures. The research concluded that there indeed was this specific connection between the choice of filter and the personality traits of the individuals (Ferwerda et al. 2015, 9-10). It is important to note that the research relied solely on quantitative data, and the analysis was color-centric as their focus was on filters. This provides

interesting data, but leaves a desire to look into the socio-cognitive states of the individual participants to be able to determine the actual personality traits as well as any cultural inclinations. This is a limitation that is also mentioned by the researchers themselves (ibid., 10-11). Additionally, the research was limited to the US making the scope of the dataset more socially and culturally singular. Albeit, the research provides a data-set that can provide a look into the connection of identity and online behavior. Although, for this research, it would be more interesting to know whether or not the identity of users is affected as a result of using social media.

### **Social Media and Language Use**

The use of language on social media has been discussed widely in previous and current literature. As social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter emerged, the ways that people communicated changed drastically. The platforms introduced micro-blogging, which, in turn, made way for a broader use of slang including abbreviations such as 'LOL' (Laugh Out Loud) and BRB (Be Right Back), etc. Zapavigna notes that the attitude system concerning slang (including abbreviations) has changed as a result of becoming a part of social media from judgment to appreciation (Zapavigna 2012, 127). Additionally, with the use of slang, a new type of humor has also emerged in which this slang is the main factor (ibid., 133). Furthermore, current research notes that the use of slang has become a way for people to promote solidarity and show belonging meaning that it becomes a factor of identity, community, and group boundaries (ibid., 130; ibid., 133). On that topic, many researchers have looked into whether or not there is a link between this heightened use of slang and literacy with the youth, but researchers actually found that it had no negative effect on the literacy. – The use of slang simply became a new language that the subjects had required which was mainly used for the purpose of messaging and online communication (Varnhagen et al. 2009, 731; Zapavigna 2012, 148).

Mass communication plays a big part in giving people information that they would not be able to receive from their social networks alone, whereas their social networks allow them to evaluate innovative behavior by examples or discussions. Furthermore, as social networks online are spreading, the nature of the way that we interact and evolve also changes substantially.

*“Through interactive electronic networking, people link together in widely dispersed locals, exchange information, share new ideas, and transact any number of pursuits. Virtual networking provides a flexible means for creating diffusion structures to serve given purposes, expanding their membership, extending them geographically, and disbanding them when they have outlived their usefulness.” (Bandura 2001, 292)*

Searching through the current literature, I did not seem to be able to find literature that explicates the notion of a globalized cultural change (or ‘global acculturation’) connected with the use of social media. The current literature *does* seem to have some focus on different levels of personal, social, and cultural implications of mass communication as well as social media, although the literature is many times quantitative and focuses only on one aspect such as language use on social media connected with literacy or immigration with levels of stress. I recognize that the literature does look into the ways that social media has become a tool for expression of identity. This research, on the other hand, detects a missed opportunity to look into social media as a tool to not only affect individual identity but also group identity on both cultural and social levels. In this way, this research aims to connect the different aspects that have been discussed in this chapter in relation to cross-cultural theories (i.e. acculturation and cultural flows) and social media usage. Because of this reciprocated connection between the two, this research proposes an acculturative process in which there is no physical movement between countries: The whole process takes place as a result of interaction on social media platforms. This led me to the presented research question (cf. chapter 1.1.) which is supported by two questions that will focus on the ways social media is used as well as its implications on language use, etc. This way, I hope to be able to connect what current literature already claims in terms of social media as a tool for identity and use of language with cultural implications on the individual as well as group level.

To be able to answer my research question most appropriately, careful methodological considerations were important. I will be presenting these in the following chapter.



### 3. Methodology

This chapter will look into the methodological considerations and designs that have been chosen to best answer the proposed research question. The chapter is divided into six main sub-chapters: Theory of Science, Research Design, Empirical Data Generation, Empirical Data, Choice of Theories, and, lastly, Definition of Concepts. I will start off the chapter by presenting the ontological and epistemological considerations which will work as the foundational paradigm for this research.

#### 3.1. Research Paradigm

For this research, I will be taking a constructivist approach which will, in turn, be the foundational consideration of the methodological choices throughout the entirety of the thesis. The considerations behind and implications of this choice will be explained in the following sections.

##### **(Social) Constructivism**

There has been some confusion over the constructivist perspective making it harder for researchers to use the philosophical perspective as their foundational understanding of truth (Pernecky 2016, 142). Nevertheless, when we look into the concepts of culture and communication, constructivist perspectives allow us to look further into the ways in which the human mind and its interpretations affect the way these concepts change and evolve. With constructivism, the researcher acknowledges the truth of the individual and highlights uniqueness. – By doing this, research helps us find the pieces that play a part in making a broader reality in society. Ultimately, with constructivist research, each individual reality has an important effect on the reality as a whole. Though, constructivism relies and focuses on the reality as described by the individual and its perceptions, it does not deny the reality of physical things and phenomenon. – It simply acknowledges that in the pursuit of research and sense-making, the understanding of subjects will be affected by whatever personal historical and social background the researcher will inevitably rely on (ibid., 142-143): “[...] *rocks and trees are not hallucinations, but our understanding of what these are is socially constructed*” (ibid., 143).

## Onto-epistemological Considerations

Expanding on this notion, this offers the question of what is 'truth'. The question of what truth entails and what makes a truth is understood differently between different researchers. The foundation of any academic research is based on our research paradigm which is, in turn, based on several considerations of what we deem as reality. This foundation is built on two main philosophical concepts: ontology and epistemology. With ontology, we ask ourselves *what* we know, whereas epistemology clarifies the question of *how* we know (Williams 2016, 154-155).

In the natural sciences, when we speak of truth, we will look to empirical truths (i.e. empiricism) in which we prove the existence of "*physical objects observable in nature*" (Pernecky 2016, 139). Such understanding of truth is usually found in the natural sciences as it looks into the tangible world of nature. On the other hand, when we speak of the intangible world of social sciences and truths of concepts such as social understandings, culture, and communication, we cannot measure this purely empirically, and from this comes the question of what truth and reality exactly is when you cannot measure it through physical senses.

When looking at ontology within the social sciences, we have two main philosophical positions: realism and idealism. These positions represent the two extreme ends on the ontological spectrum. Both discuss the way in which we can understand how and where reality is constructed. Realism argues for the perspective that there is a reality externally from the human mind and that constructs of such reality is separate and independent from our understanding of it (McLaughlin 2012, 24-25). At the other end of the spectrum, however, idealism (such as constructivism) speaks of reality as being a part of the human understanding of it. – Reality is fluid and interchangeable with our individual understandings of it. The philosophy understands the existence of nature without humans, but believes that the meaning of this nature is not possible without the interpretation of humans. McLaughlin quotes Crotty (2003) to explain this concept: "*The existence of a world without a mind is conceivable. Meaning without mind is not*" (ibid.). For this reason, this research will be taking an idealistic ontological approach as I look into individual socio-cognitive behaviors and understandings that are affected by the processes of acculturation on social media.

As for epistemological understandings, we ask ourselves *how* we know reality. Within the academic world, we speak of two main epistemologies: *Positivism* and *Interpretivism*. – Constructivism is also

commonly used to represent the latter half of the epistemological spectrum. These two philosophical spheres also correspond with two different methodological approaches which are *nomothetic* ("lawful") and *idiographic* ("descriptive") (Millis et al. 2010, 333). Nomothetic approaches in research will look to generalize and will most often be based on quantitative (or numeric) data. Idiographic approaches, on the other hand, will usually rely on qualitative data to recognize uniqueness (ibid.). For the purpose of this research, I will be basing my methodology on qualitative data that can help me understand and conceptualize the individual stances of my subjects. For this reason, an interpretivist (or constructivist) epistemology is deemed most appropriate.

### **Methodological Implications**

Though constructivism along with both the idealist ontology and interpretivist epistemology is usually associated with pure qualitative methodologies, the use of quantitative data is still applicable (Pernecky 2016, 144). – This will be the case for this research to which I will apply both quantitative data (i.e. survey) and qualitative data (i.e. interviews). Although, as a result of the idealist/interpretivist philosophy, I will be using the qualitative data as the main focus in my analysis, whereas the survey data will work to back up claims regarding the use of language and main use of the two platforms Facebook and Instagram. In this way, the survey is only working to answer factual questions regarding certain behaviors, whereas the interview data will focus on answering *why* these behaviors occur.

As a researcher, I seek to understand the realities of my subjects; the social constructs of which they create meaning through their own understandings. As this research looks into the social concept of culture, the reality which I will be looking into will be a part of the intangible world. Looking into the cultural and social understandings of individuals, I will be able to delve deeper into the constructed understandings of reality from individual respondents fitting to the idealistic understanding of reality. – I understand these realities as fluid and closely connected to humans' interpretations of it. Additionally, I acknowledge that there are different realities or conceptions of the same in different circumstances such as social and political surroundings. Such differences are also visible when we look into different countries.

## **3.2. Research Design**

This next sub-chapter will focus on the methodological approach that has been chosen in terms of data and analytical design. As mentioned, I will be working with both survey-data and interviews. First, we will look into the meaning of working with a new phenomenon in terms of academic reasoning (deductive versus inductive), which will then be followed by a chapter dealing with the implications of mixed methods.

### **3.2.1. Deductive/Inductive Approach**

The purpose of this thesis is to enlighten a new type of phenomenon in the shape of a global type of acculturation. As the concept of acculturation is an existing concept in literature today, I will be working with its basic form in a deductive approach by basing the analysis on my theoretical framework (cf. chapter 4). Although, as the global aspect of the phenomenon of acculturation is a new addition to the existing literature, I will also be working inductively, as there will be a need to highlight any additional links to the current literature based on my findings from my analysis (cf. chapter 5). This way, I will base my analytical considerations on existing theoretical approaches from which I will expand my theoretical findings (cf. chapter 4).

The mixed approach will allow me to add and compare to the existing literature with a new phenomenon which is still intrinsically based on the fundamental understandings and agreements between scholars. Consequently, the collection of data will be very important as this will be the basis for my argumentations and understanding of implications that come as a result of the ways that people use social media.

### **3.2.2. Mixed Methods**

Although this research is based on a constructivist paradigm to which idiographic (i.e. qualitative) approaches are most common, I will be combining both qualitative and quantitative data: Interviews and surveys. Though mixed methods has been argued against in relation to its differing epistemological commitments (Bryman 2012, 629), I believe that the inclusion of survey data will help expand my data to include a wider group of subjects. As the research is of a global nature yet looking into socio-cognitive aspects in relation to cultural habits, a mixed methods-approach seems

most appropriate. Furthermore, the ability to collect data from various countries seems highly appropriate and positive. Additionally, the survey data will work as generalizing depictions which will be further substantiated by the interviews. This also means that the interviews will become the main element of the analysis. For this reason, the research design is still deemed in appropriate relation to the research paradigm. The use of mixed methods will ensure that I will be able to provide a picture of the general status across countries with wider-reaching quantitative data (i.e. surveys), whereas qualitative data (i.e. written interviews) will allow me to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the effects closer to the subjects themselves.

First, I will focus on collecting survey-data which I will then use as my basis for the selection of my purposive sample for interviews. I will delve deeper into the theoretical considerations that went into this process of data collection in the next chapter.

### **3.3. Empirical Data Generation**

To be able to enlighten the way that people use social media as well as the way that this use affects their cultural and social cognition, it is important to look at data that can highlight the subject (i.e. the individual) over the object (i.e. social media). To accomplish this, I have chosen to focus on survey and interview data.

I will be using surveys and interviews as opposed to social media big data as the surveys and interviews will provide me with a closer look into how people *use*, are *connected* to, and are, as a result, *affected by* social media, rather than looking at big data from the chosen platforms which will only show me the result of chosen behaviors online. Furthermore, the use of only primary data offers a more focused research looking into the effect on the subjects, personally. Additionally, to ensure a more precise and concise data collection, the research will focus on data from only Facebook and Instagram. These two platforms were deemed appropriate as they are the most competitive social media platforms on a global level. Also, both platforms are based on sharing personal posts (i.e. pictures, etc.) and is, therefore, considered highly relevant and informative in terms of representing socio-cognitive habits of the subjects.

I will start off by presenting the theoretical considerations behind the development, distribution, and processing of the survey data in **sub-chapter 3.3.1.** and will then continue to provide the same information in relation to the interview process in **sub-chapter 3.3.2.**

### **3.3.1. Survey**

In this chapter, I will elaborate on the considerations behind the choices made in terms of the development, distribution, collection, and operationalization of my survey. To make and distribute the survey, I made use of the program SurveyXact (SurveyXact 2020), which allows easy and safe distribution, collection, and analysis of survey data.

#### **3.3.1.1. Survey: Research Objective**

To make a clear and concise survey, it is important to recognize the research objective of the data collection. For the purpose of this research, the survey will be used to help answer my two supporting research questions:

1. What is the primary use of social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook?
2. How do users of social media use platforms such as Instagram and Facebook in terms of language use, etc.?

Looking into the primary use of the platforms will help me understand the possible implications that can come from the use of such platforms based on the different uses it may have: To be able to identify the behaviors and their implications, I will need to understand the reason behind the behaviors in the first place. Therefore, this data will be a significant variable in understanding the socio-cognitive implications in relation to global acculturation.

In terms of exploring users' use of English (alongside their primary use of the platforms), a survey is a good tool for data collection as it allows a big collection of data and, as the variable is measurable quantitatively, the data is easy to process.

### 3.3.1.2. Survey: Degree of Researcher Involvement

Like there are different modes of doing surveys, there are also different levels of involvement of the researcher. The higher the involvement, the more the respondents might feel pressured to answer in what they deem as *agreeable* or *likeable*, which Toepoel presents as the *social desirability bias* (Toepoel 2016, 11). As this survey is based on non-probability snowball sampling, there is a risk of a level of interviewer involvement. To reduce this, I made sure that the survey was shared publicly on social media instead of privately to individuals. Furthermore, the survey was made sure to be anonymous to be sure that the respondents would be comfortable to answer their actual perspectives rather than what they deem as socially desirable.

### 3.3.1.3. Survey Sampling Approach

In terms of the focus of global acculturation, the population of my research includes anyone using social media platforms, whereas the focus on my particular thesis gives a preference to a sampling frame including people using the social media platforms Facebook and/or Instagram.

For the sake of the research, I attempted to reach as many different ethnic and national groups to be able to provide a broader depiction of the global impact of social media use on cultural and social cognitive stances. To be able to do this most effectively within the resources and time that was available to me, I made use of *non-probability sampling* and, more specifically, *snowball sampling* (Bryman 2012, 202).

Though non-probability sampling can be speculated to be biased as the sampling is, technically, not chosen by random, the snowball approach allowed me to reach more people through personal contacts. By using this type of sampling, I hope to ensure a higher success rate in reaching the desired amount of respondents.

The ideal size of the study population for this research is around 100-200 people. The limit is set with the understanding that, today, the response rates to surveys has severely dropped and people are reluctant in partaking in such research (ibid., 199). This is another factor that played a part in the choice to use snowball sampling as there is either a direct or indirect connection between the researcher and respondent. – i.e. The risk of non-responses was deemed lower with this connection with the researcher. Had I made use of emails to send out the surveys randomly, I would have risked ending up in spam folders or for people to assume that the email was not relevant to them. This is a problem that was indeed encountered in the interview process, despite the emails that were used

were collected directly from the respondents themselves. This issue will be highlighted further in sub-chapter 3.3.2.

Additionally, this particular approach let me send out the surveys more strategically to be able to reach different ethnic and social groups as opposed to being limited to particular communities such as Danish university students, etc. (ibid.).

### Final Sample

The survey was open for respondents for 43 days, and, in the end, the number of respondents reached 144. Based on countries, the Respondents were distributed as follows:

Continent	Europe (53.5%)	Americas (2.8%)	Asia (43.1%)	Oceania (0.7%)
Country	Austria (0.7%)	Panama (1.4%)	China (2.1%)	Australia (0.7%)
	Bosnia and Herzegovina (2.1%)	USA (1.4%)	Indonesia (16%)	
	Belgium (0.7%)		Japan (0.7%)	
	Bulgaria (1.4%)		Macau (0.7%)	
	Denmark (33.3%)		Malaysia (0.7%)	
	France (1.4%)		South Korea (21.5%)	
	Germany (2.1%)		Vietnam (0.7%)	
	Iceland (0.7%)		Thailand (0.7%)	
	Italy (2.8%)			



	Latvia (0.7%)			
	Norway (1.4%)			
	Slovenia (0.7%)			
	Sweden (4.9%)			
	United Kingdom (0.7%)			

**Table 1** – Overview of Respondents' current country of residence

The survey was shared on my own and my contacts' social media sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn, to be able to reach as many respondents as possible.

The appropriateness of the sample was based on the distribution of countries as the research tries to conceptualize a global phenomenon. Therefore, the need for respondents from different countries and continents is crucial to reflect a global subject as is highlighted by the research question, and, ultimately, this factor of reach in terms of countries was deemed a pertinent means of measurement for success. Here, it is important to mention the bias that came from the sampling type that was chosen: Since I have no contacts from Africa, the chances of reaching the continent were poor from the beginning. For this reason, the data cannot be fully representable in terms of a global society, though the data is still deemed relevant as it does show a representation of a *substantial part* of the global society.

The survey was deemed appropriate to end at this time, as the distribution of the respondents' countries was fairly balanced. As another consequence of snowball sampling, the respondents were, in the beginning, mostly respondents from Denmark as a result of my own nationality. – More than 50% of the respondents were from Denmark. Therefore, it was important for me to be able to level out the distribution of the respondents to include a lower percentage from Denmark as to not collect data that is too overweighed by a Danish bias. This way, I hope to be able to provide a data-set and analysis that is more representative of a global society and, as a result, develop a more feasible and legitimate theoretical discussion. As the survey data is presented now, the respondents from Denmark take up 33% of the total respondents (cf. **Appendix 1**). This is still a bigger proportion of the overall respondents, but we also see that 21.5% and 16% of the respondents are from South Korea and Indonesia, respectively, balancing out the bias. Additionally, if we look at the native

languages of the respondents from the responses, they differ greatly to the countries of origin (cf. **Appendix 1**).

It is also important to note that – though the global reach in terms of countries is important – for the purpose of this research, cultural attributions are not determined solely on the country of origin. The reach of the survey is mostly important in terms of analyzing a global concept. Therefore, the data is merely used to detect any possible correlations between the respondents and their behaviors online. – And such correlations would be deemed indications of a global social commonality that would be used to conceptualize the phenomenon of global acculturation.

#### **3.3.1.4. Survey Questions**

When outlining and creating the survey questions, I relied on my two supporting research questions as a guide to ensure focus on the underlying concepts to answer my main research question (cf. chapter 1.1.). They allowed me to make sure that the questions presented in the surveys were relevant to answering the research question.

As the purpose of the survey is to gather data that can provide me a more general picture of the behaviors on social media, the questions will – as much as possible – be *closed questions* (Bryman 2012, 249). This will also make the survey easier to answer and will, hopefully, mean that the response rate could be higher. As mentioned earlier, Bryman mentions that surveys and questionnaires are receiving fewer and fewer respondents, making the use of an easier option for the respondents even more important (ibid., 199). Additionally, the use of closed questions will make the coding process of the collected answers easier. When using open questions, it can be hard to determine and group the meaning of respondents' answers. Closed questions, on the other hand, reduce the ambiguity of answers and allows me as the researcher to provide groupings that are deemed relevant for the research. – This also makes comparability between respondents' answers more feasible. Furthermore, there is also a higher risk in the respondents misunderstanding the questions. – Using closed questions and providing answer options, might clear up the meaning of the questions for the respondents (ibid., 249-52).

Additionally, open questions will be introduced in the second part of the data collection (i.e. interviews) (cf. chapter 3.3.2.). Here, I will be able to have certain respondents elaborate with open questions.

As for the structure of the survey, the survey questions are divided into **three main parts**:

1. Introductory questions (age, sex, nationality, etc.)
2. Questions focusing on Instagram
3. Questions focusing on Facebook

The first group of questions are added to help enlighten any bias in terms of gender, age, etc. Part 2 and 3 consist of the same questions, but simply related to different platforms. This is to ensure that – should some respondents not be a user on one platform – they will still be able to provide the same type of information based on the different platform. This structure also ensures easier comparability between the data collected for both platforms.

The full and final set of questions used for the surveys can be found in **Appendix 2**.

#### **3.3.1.5. Survey Answer Options**

Answers will be closed with multiple-choice options such as:

What is your main use of Instagram? (Choose the most fitting)

- |                          |                                     |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| - Entertainment          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| - News                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| - Socializing            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| - Other (Please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

The qualitative addition of “Other” is important to add whenever applicable to be able to reduce any faulty data. As a researcher, I might miss a specific use of social media platforms or other factors, and by adding the option of “other”, I allow the respondents to add unusual answers that I may not have thought of as a researcher. As a constructivist, I recognize my understanding of reality as a result of my own interpretation of it, which is, in turn, affected by my historical background and

social circumstances. Therefore, this allows different realities to emerge which I may not have been previously aware of (Bryman 2015, 247).

Additionally, where applicable, I decided to use grouped numbers rather than answers such as “not so often,” “often,” and “very often” to avoid ambiguity in the answers as much as possible:

Looking at your last four posts on Instagram, did you use English in your captions? (incl. any abbreviations such as "tbh," "asap," etc.)

- Yes, one time ☐
- Yes, two times ☐
- Yes, three times ☒
- Yes, in all four posts ☐
- No, not in any of the four posts ☐

By carefully constructing the questions and answers in this way, I hope to be able to collect data that is true to the understandings of the respondents. Furthermore, I hope to be able to avoid respondents not giving full answers (i.e. leaving the survey before finishing it) by making the survey easy and clear to answer.

### **Survey Reflection**

The survey was seen to mostly be successful in terms of respondents finishing the full survey. This could be a positive result of the careful choice of short and clear questions and answers. In the end, only four people did not – for any reason – finish the survey. For the sake of the analysis of the data, the respondents who had only answered a small part of the survey were not included in the final data.

The next sub-chapter will look into the operationalization of the collected data.

#### **3.3.1.6. Survey Data Operationalization**

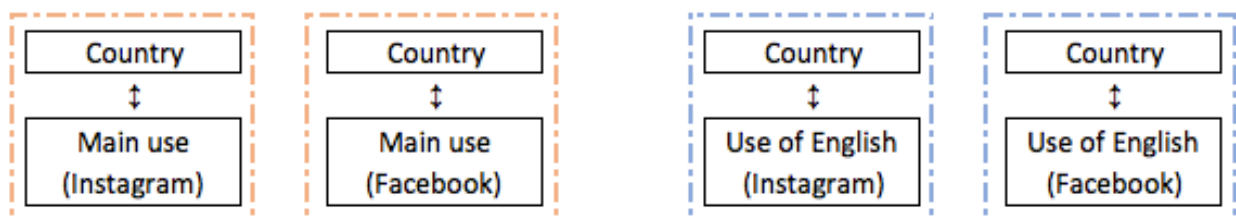
To be able to use my data in my analysis, I will need to process the acquired data. First of all, I will start by dividing the data into categories which I can then compare to each other to find similarities or differences that can be significant to answering my research question. It is important to process

quantitative data in a way that allows us to be able to find patterns and correlations within the data. Factors and concepts will be able to be drawn out by creating a categorization and/or data form of the collected data.

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this survey data is to collect data that can help answer the questions of the primary use of the platforms as well as the language use.

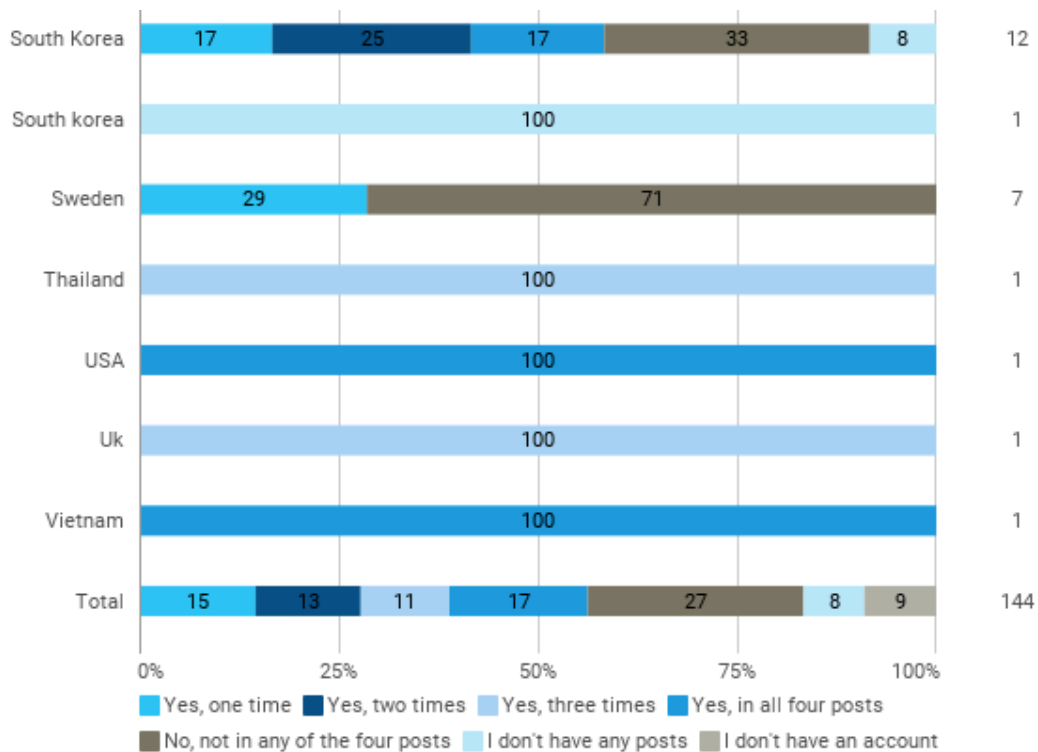
For this reason, I have decided to look into two specific questions from the survey: (1) What is your main use of Instagram/Facebook? and (2) Looking at your last four posts on Instagram/Facebook, did you use English in your captions? Both these questions look specifically into the supporting research questions and will, therefore, be ideal data to look further into. The focus will be on both Instagram and Facebook, individually.

Additionally, as the main focus of this research is the global aspect of acculturation, it is interesting to see this data compared to the countries in which the respondents are located. This is done to make sure that there are no substantial differences between the countries: I.e. whether the data can, in fact, be deemed as representable across the difference countries. Therefore, the variables “Main use” and “Use of English” will both be compared with the variable “Country of residence”, respectively. Putting all the comparisons together, it leaves me with four different variables:



**Figure 1** – Main variables for survey operationalization

The operationalization will be done with the help of analytical tools provided by SurveyXact. SurveyXact allows users to cross-compare data collected through surveys. Here, I chose the answers for the four main foci of the data: Main Use (Instagram), Main Use (Facebook), Use of English (Instagram), and Use of English (Facebook) and cross-compared them with the answers to country of residence with the help of the analysis option “Frequency (Divided)”. An example of the data that is provided by SurveyXact is as following:



**Figure 2** – Example of SurveyXact’s Frequency analysis: “‘Use of English’ crossed over ‘Country of Residence’”

As the country of residence of the respondents was answered in text and not chosen by options, the analytical feature divides any different type of text into individual categories. As we see in the example above, 12 respondents have written ‘South Korea’ whereas one has written ‘South korea’ with a lowercase ‘k’. For this reason, I had to go through the data in Excel and combine all the data that were in fact referring to the same country into a table. From there, the percentage of each answer relating to their country of residence is calculated.

The comparison of the variables will be done by looking at the percentual relations between the categories. This way, I hope to be able to highlight possible correlations and/or differences that can lead me to an understanding and conceptualization of global acculturation. The categorization and understanding of the survey data is, of course, only the first step in the conceptualization of the global acculturation. The processed data from the collected surveys will be further substantiated by the interview data, which will be introduced in sub-chapter 3.3.2.

The processed survey data will be presented in chapter 3.4.

### **3.3.1.7. Survey: Ethical Considerations**

To protect the respondents, I chose to keep the survey anonymous and have ensured that no personal data is stored after the survey and analysis' completion. After the completion of the thesis, the individual answers will be deleted, and only the analyzed data in this thesis (which will not include personal data) will be available. Furthermore, as I do ask for emails from respondents that are willing to do interviews, these will also be deleted after the completion of the respectable interviews.

To ensure the confidence of the respondents, the fact that their data would be protected was disclosed in the introductory page of the survey.

### **3.3.1.8. Survey: Limitations, Sampling Error, and Credibility**

#### **Language Barrier**

It is important to notice that the survey will be executed in English as a result of limited resources. This will limit the extent of the data that I will be able to collect, as the respondents will only be people that are capable in the English language. In extension, this means that the respondents– as a result of speaking English as opposed to not being able to – are more likely to *use* English on social media. The respondents that are unable to answer the survey due to language barriers will then also automatically be excluded from the data. Because of this, it is important to make it clear, that the data will only be able to enlighten the extent to which non-native *English-speaking* people use English on social media.

#### **Population Reach**

Ideally, the distribution of respondents would be equal to all countries, genders, and ages, but, due to limitations of this research, the data that was collected was deemed to be most appropriate for the scope of this thesis. Although, if we look at the distribution across continents, the respondents are more evenly distributed across Asia and Europe. Furthermore, many respondents – though located in Denmark at the time that they answered the survey – were not permanent residents of Denmark: Around 23% of the respondents who are in Denmark at the time of this research are there on either short-term or long-term student or working visas. Therefore, there is still reason to believe that the data collected is representable on a global scale. This is also something that can be seen in

the data showcasing the mother-tongues of the respondents: These languages included many national languages that were not represented by the current country of residence, such as Swahili, Greek, and Somali, etc. (cf. **Appendix 1**).

Additionally, the collected data shows a bias towards a younger generation, as 91% of all of the respondents were in the age groups 21-25 and 26-30 years old (cf. **Appendix 1**). This can be seen as an indication of the group of people that is mainly active on social media.

### **Social Media Platforms**

Additionally, it is also important to note that the social media platforms that are focused on in the data (i.e. Facebook and Instagram) limits the scope of the respondents as there are countries who mainly use social media platforms that are not used in Western societies (e.g. Chinese social media platform Weibo).

Though there perhaps is a way to include these platforms as well, it was believed that such platforms were not particularly relevant for this study as they do not perform globally. This study tries to look into the global use of social media and its consequent effect on lingual and cultural cognitive stances. Therefore, even with the exclusion of such platforms, the data collected was deemed representable in terms of reach and relevance.

In the next sub-chapters, I will be discussing the considerations in relation to the construction, distribution, and collection of the interview data as the second part of the data collection.

### **3.3.2. Interviews**

As a social constructivist, I see reality as a clear connection between actions and humans' perception of these actions. The use of interview data allows me to look into these perceptions and understandings from the individual subjects' point of view. In the following sub-chapters, I will be explaining the considerations that took place in the process of making and collecting the interview data.



### **3.3.2.1. Interview: Research Objective**

Like the survey, the interview questions will be based on my supporting research questions (cf. chapter 1.1.) to ensure relevant data collection in terms of answering my main research question. The interview questions should help elaborate and expand on the data collected from the surveys in terms of adding more qualitative data as well as focusing more on the individual response to cultural and social cognitions. Additionally, the purpose of the interviews is also to focus more on the private aspect of the respondents. – This means the social and cultural implications of the respondents off the social media platforms Facebook and Instagram. Such questions will help me in finding any correlation between the online activities expressed in the surveys and offline implications of such to help answer the main research question: How does the way we use social media today play a part in the shaping of a global acculturation, and in which ways does this type of acculturation affect socio-cognitive behaviors of the individual?

Ultimately, the question that I seek to answer with this research is whether there are any social and/or cultural cognitive implications on the individual as a result of the use of and contact with others through social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram

### **3.3.2.2. Interview: Degree of Researcher Involvement**

Just like there can be pressure on the respondents to answer the survey a certain way, there can also be such pressure (and even more so) with interviews. The interviews are intrinsically based on the same type of sampling, as the respondents were chosen from the survey data. The pressure to answer questions in what respondents believe to be desirable is more prominent in interviews as interview questions are usually more personal and in-depth as opposed to survey data which, most of the time, is based on multiple choice answers. Because of this, there is a risk of social desirability bias (Toepoel 2016, 11). To reduce this, I made sure to ensure the respondents that their answers would remain anonymous and their email accounts would be deleted after the interview answers were received.

### **3.3.2.3. Interview Sampling**

The original aim for the amount of interviews was five Respondents. This amount was deemed adequate in proportion to the amount of survey answers received. Additionally, five interviews were

deemed to be enough to get a closer look into some different variables and more in-depth understanding of the ways in which social media was used and perceived by the respondents.

Although, as there is always a risk of people not responding, the interview questions were, originally, sent out to six people. This way, I hoped to be able to reduce the risk of not having enough respondents. In the end, unfortunately, only three people responded to the interview questions. To try to get closer to the aim of five respondents, the interview questions were sent – by random – to three more people. From this, one response came back. Therefore, in the end, I received four responses in total.

The process of choosing who should be sent the interview questions were first of all based on the email domains: To be able to broaden the scope of the interviews in terms of countries reached, I tried to find emails that indicated different countries of origin. As most emails were using the same global domains, when different countries were not traceable, the respondents were chosen at random.

The respondents were sent the interview questions to their emails which were provided in the surveys. As mentioned earlier, the respondents were assured that the emails were only going to be used for this purpose and that they would be deleted after the completion of the interviews. The respondents were given one week to answer the questions to be able to stick to a viable timeline for the research.

### **Interview Reflection**

Initially, the non-response rate was expected to be low as the respondents were all chosen from a list of emails that were provided by the respondents themselves. In the end, though, the non-response rate proved to be much higher than expected. This caused some issues in terms of time limitation as it took much longer to get an appropriate amount of interviews done. Perhaps, had the interviews been sent out closer to the date of which the respondents answered the survey, there would have been a higher response rate. Although, it is important to note that it would have been difficult to determine when each of the respondent answered the survey and, therefore, the risk of a longer wait for some respondents would still be present.

#### **3.3.2.4. Interview Style**

The interviews will be in written form for the comfortability for the respondents and easier reach, as the scope of the sample population is global and there will be issues regarding scheduling due to time differences, etc. Furthermore, by doing written interviews, it ensures that the respondent can spend more time to answer the questions as well as help avoid any feelings of stress and/or subconscious pressure from the interviewee, as mentioned in sub-chapter 3.3.2.2. Additionally, during oral interviews, it can become difficult for the interviewer to keep track of questions and answers, and wordings of certain questions may differ for each interview. – A written interviews allows me to ensure that all Respondents are given the same exact questions avoiding clashes in the collected data and analysis.

Because the interviews are executed in written form, I hoped it would allow me to collect more data than had it been oral interviews. This way, I hoped to make a more representable data collection and analysis. Albeit, as was mentioned in the previous sub-chapter, the non-response rate was much higher than expected, and it was difficult to obtain a lot of respondents for the interviews though many had provided their emails for this exact purpose.

#### **3.3.2.5. Interview Questions**

As mentioned earlier, the interview questions will be used to elaborate on the survey questions by highlighting socio-cognitive stances and behavioral habits and changes from the respondents.

As for the structure of the interview questions, the questions will be divided into **3 main chronological sections**:

1. Introductory questions (age, sex, nationality, etc.)
2. General use of account
3. Online inspiration

Once again, the first group of questions are added to ensure demographic understanding of the interviewees. The second group of questions will try to decipher the use of the social media platforms: What considerations go into deciding what to upload? Who do people follow and why? As well as participation in viral challenges, etc. I hope that these types of questions will allow me to understand the desires of social media and the effects that it has on our thought processes and behaviors online (as well as offline). Furthermore, this group of questions will hopefully help me

answer my first and second supporting research questions: (1) What is the primary use of social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook? and (2) How do users of social media use platforms such as Instagram and Facebook in terms of language use, etc.?

Additionally, the questions will also seek to enlighten behavioral inclinations of the interviewees offline. As an example, these questions will include:

*“Have you ever visited a place after seeing it from others online? What made you decide to go?” and “If you have ever donated to an online charity, what made you decide to do this?”*

By asking such questions, I hope to link the online presence with the offline choices of the respondents. Once again, I hope to be able to enlighten the thought processes that take part in decision-making offline.

All in all, by gaining this insight into the thought-processes and behaviors, I hope to be able to further understand the mechanisms that take place during a possible global acculturation: What connection there is between the values and behaviors online and offline.

The full set of interview questions can be found in **Appendix 3**.

### **3.3.2.6. Interview Analysis**

To start off the process of analyzing the interview data, I began by reading through all the answers and then going back to highlight any recurring themes or comments from the respondents. From this beginning phase, I found several recurring themes that were interesting in terms of the theoretical standpoint and focus of this research: (1) All respondents use some level of English in their posts, (2) All respondents were aware of their ‘likes’ (i.e. following the amount of ‘likes’ and who had given them), (3) All respondents had tried to take part in a ‘viral challenge’ or ‘viral trend’, and (4) All respondents had made behavioral choices offline based on online inspiration/influence. The themes will work as the four main points for the analysis, where I will be going deeper into these aspects, as well as other correlating points, and their possible implications (cf. chapter 5).

Alongside the survey data, the analysis of the collected interview data will be used to highlight any implications and/or phenomena that take place as a result of the way that social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram are used. This, in turn, will be used to emphasize and draw attention to any missing aspects to the existing literature. This will be done by analyzing the data based on a theoretical framework which will be presented in chapter 4.

#### **3.3.2.7. Interview: Ethical Considerations**

As with the survey, it was important for me to make sure that the Respondents were comfortable answering the questions that they were given as well as the setting in which they were being answered. As mentioned earlier in sub-chapter 3.3.2.4., the interview is in a written form which will ensure that they Respondents are not pressured or unconsciously directed by the researcher.

As for privacy, it is always important to ensure the safety of a research's subjects. All Respondents were assured that the provided emails would not be shared to any third parties as well as be deleted after the completion the thesis work.

#### **3.3.2.8. Interview Limitations and Credibility**

As a researcher, I tried to make sure to reach interviewees of different national backgrounds to ensure a more diverse and global data-set. Although, the high non-response rate meant that the reach for the interview was substantially limited. Furthermore, because of the non-response rate, the amount of interviewees is also lower than expected, as mentioned earlier. Nonetheless, with the additional use of survey data, I hope to be able to understand more general phenomena as these have reached a higher number of respondents. Furthermore, for the purpose of this project, the amount of interviewees is deemed acceptable as the research tries to prove that there is a possible connection between the socio-cognitive behaviors and cultural understandings of individuals and the way in which we interact on social media. – I.e. the research question explores the correlation of two main parts: The individual and social media. Such correlation is believed to be on a low, individual level.

Additionally, with the ontological and epistemological beliefs presented in chapter 2.1., the individual truth is still understood as a representation of the social truth, and total generalization is not achievable.

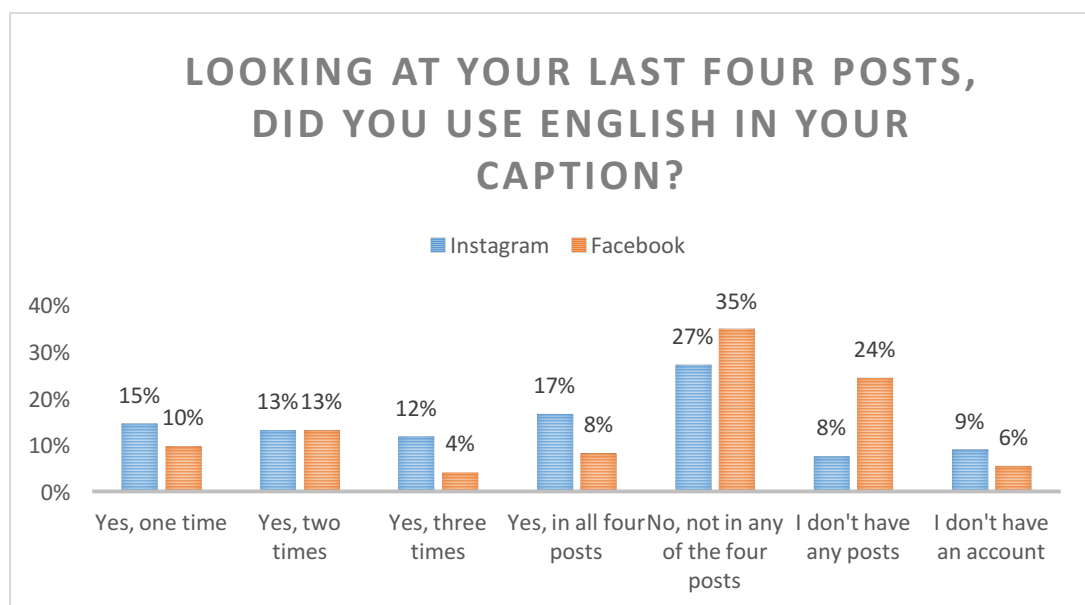
In the next chapter, I will be presenting the collected and processed data from both the survey and interviews.

### 3.4. Empirical Data

In this chapter, I will start off by presenting the survey data that has been collected and processed with the help of analytical tools from SurveyXact. This will be followed by a brief introduction of the four interviewees.

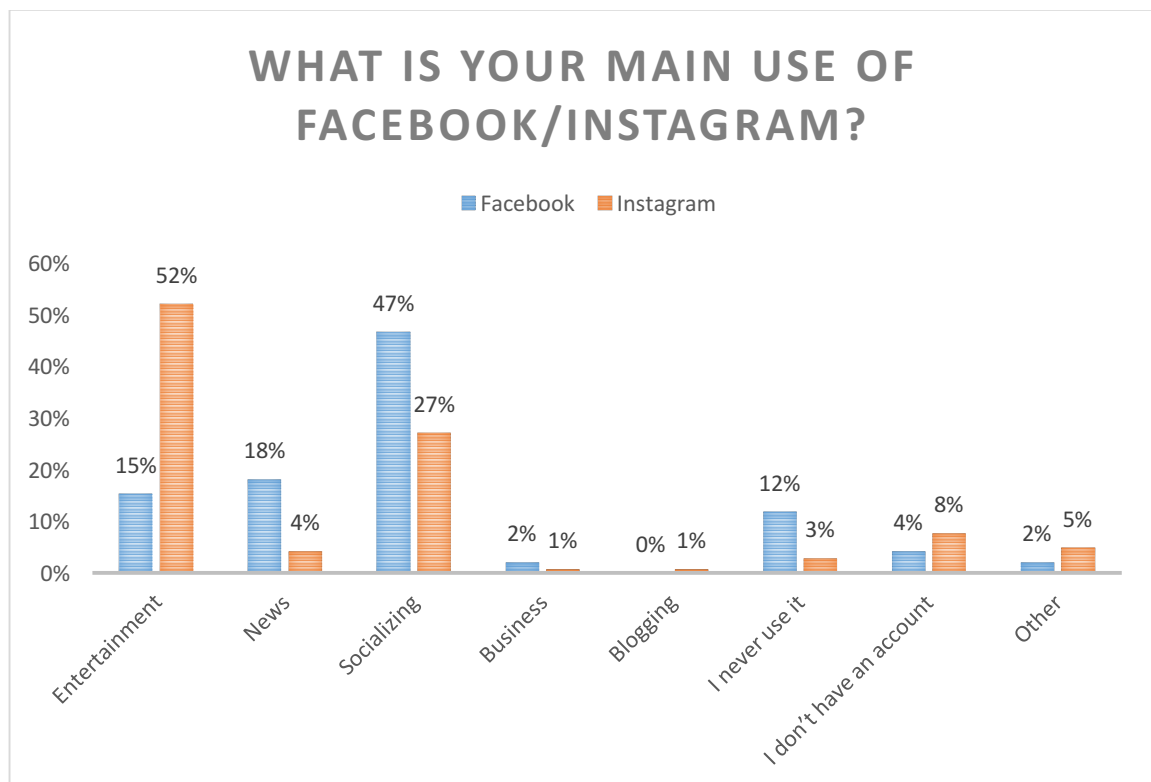
#### 3.4.1. Survey Data

By going through the survey data the way which it was presented in chapter 3.3.1.6., I was able to find the data reflected in the following two graphs:



**Graph 1 – Use of English on Facebook and Instagram**

On **Graph 1**, we see a slight difference between Instagram and Facebook in terms of language use: Users on Instagram seem to be more prone to use English than users on Facebook. For Instagram, collectively, 56 percent of users have used English in their captions at least once in their last four posts, whereas for Facebook, this number is 35 percent.



**Graph 2 – Main use of Facebook and Instagram**

From **Graph 2**, we can see that the most prominent answers were Entertainment for Instagram with 52 percent and Socializing for Facebook with 47 percent. Another 18 percent of the respondents answered that their main use of Facebook was for news, whereas this number is only 4 percent for Instagram users.

Looking at the data divided by each specific country, there seems to be no substantial differences between the percentual values. Because of this, the data presented above in Graph 1 and 2 is deemed representative across the countries (cf. Appendix 4).

The full processed survey data can be found in **Appendix 4**.

### **3.4.2. Presentation of Interviewees**

In this sub-chapter, I will briefly introduce the four interviewees.

#### **3.4.2.1. “Interviewee A” (Appendix 5)**

26-year old from South Korea. At the time of the interview, Interviewee is only active on Instagram, though the interviewee does have a Facebook account, as well.

#### **3.4.2.2. “Interviewee B” (Appendix 6)**

30-year old from Denmark. At the time of the interview, Interviewee is active on both Instagram and Facebook.

#### **3.4.2.3. “Interviewee C” (Appendix 7)**

27-year old from Sweden. At the time of the interview, Interviewee is active on both Instagram and Facebook.

#### **3.4.2.4. “Interviewee D” (Appendix 8)**

25-year old from Denmark. At the time of the interview, Interviewee is active on both Instagram and Facebook.

To be able to make the most beneficial analysis, a theoretical framework is chosen to act as the foundational understanding and representation of the basic concept of Acculturation as well as Social Cognitive Theory. The considerations behind this theoretical framework will be presented in the next chapter.

### **3.5. Choice of Theories**

In this chapter, I will present the theoretical framework based on Acculturation and Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication (SCT-MC). The theoretical framework will act as my foundation for the conceptualization of global acculturation. As this research focuses on social media, Social



Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication will play a crucial part in the analysis as it introduces many different concepts and mechanisms important to this research. For this reason, SCT-MC will take up a bigger part of the theoretical framework in terms of concepts, etc.

The chosen theories as well as the ways in which they are believed to complement each other will be introduced in the following sub-chapters.

### **Acculturation by Sam and Berry (2010)**

Theoretical aspects of Acculturation by David L. Sam and John W. Berry (2010) will be applied to help understand the foundational aspects of the theory of acculturation itself. This reference will be used as Berry is considered one of the most active scholars on the topic making the reference be academically high level and trustworthy. This theory of acculturation will be used as the basic framework in order to further conceptualize the new phenomenon of *global* acculturation.

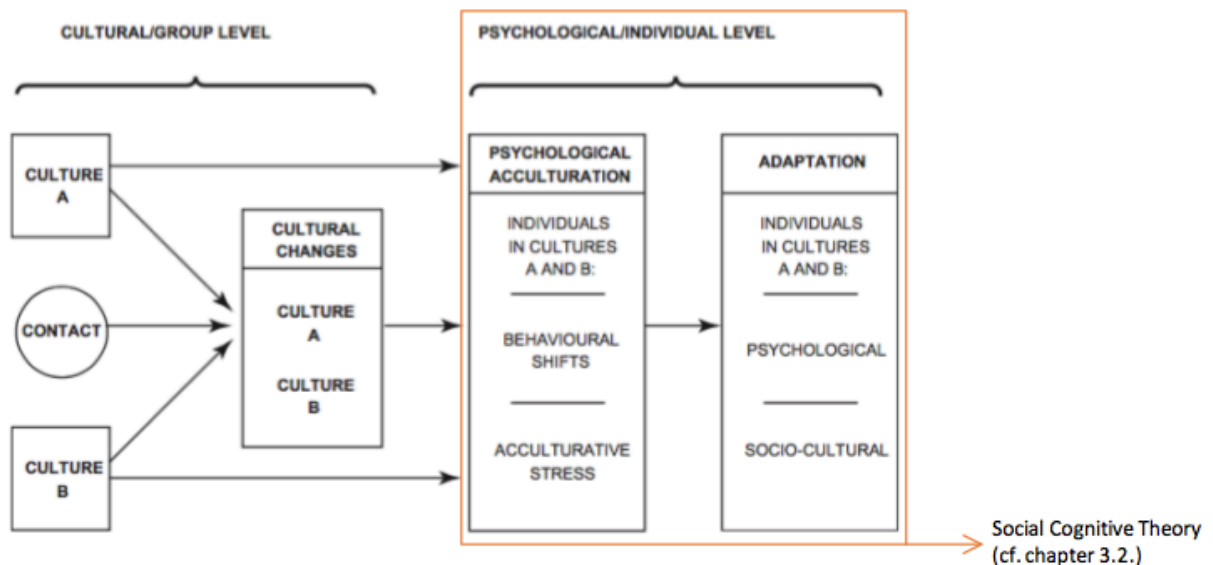
The model introduced by Sam and Berry allows me to look into the different social and individual levels of acculturative effects. – It is deemed fit for the purpose of this research as it allows the complementation of socio-cognitive discussions in its second level (psychological/individual level) in relation to acculturation. This will take a predominant part in the analysis of my data, as well as in the understanding of the implications of the use of social media.

### **Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication by Bandura (2005)**

Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication (SCT-MC) (Bandura 2005) presents different factors that play a part in the use and effect of mass communication on individual social cognitions. This specific reference is used as Bandura was the original scholar that started the development of this theory and has continued developing the theory since.

The theory expands to group behavior as mass communication is recognized as having the ability to generate cognitive changes in societies. Interesting to this research, the theory presents different mechanisms and processes that take part in the modeling of social and individual beliefs and actions. The theory allows me to understand the socio-cognitive mechanisms that take part in social and individual change as well as a focus on the specific benefits (and other effects) of social media in such change which is a crucial addition to this research.

The two theories will be used as my theoretical framework to understand the mechanisms that play a part in the different phenomena already discussed by current literature. With the help of this framework, I hope to be able to highlight different acculturative implications that have come as a result of the use of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram.



**Figure 3 – Theoretical Framework**

In terms of acculturation, social cognitive factors will play a part in this process as the individual will be changing social and cultural normative stances. To this, SCT-MC is a crucial addition in better understanding the more in-depth psychological mechanisms that play a part in the process of (global) acculturation and its implications.

Additionally, the Theory of Mass Communication, specifically, is a good addition as it connects social cognitive explanations to social media communication which, in turn, allows me to understand the global aspect of global acculturation.

### 3.6. Definition of Concepts

As I will be looking into the concept of culture, it is important to clarify what specific aspects of the concept that I will be focusing on as well as the way that I will be defining them. Culture is a very

broad term and has been defined many different ways for different purposes. Usually, the definition of culture is based on the context of the researcher. According to John R. Baldwin, Sandra L. Faulkner, Michael L. Hecht, and Sheryl L. Lindsley who present more than 300 different definitions of culture from different academic disciplines (Baldwin et al. 2005), the most prominent definition of culture is described as *“some set of elements shared by people who have a social structure, with the latter referred to as ‘society’”* (Baldwin et al. 2005, 7). This shall also be the definition that I will be using for this research.

Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) discussed the definitions and conceptualizations of culture and presented six groupings of such:

- “1. Enumeratively descriptive (a list of the content of culture)*
- 2. Historical (emphasis on social heritage, tradition)*
- 3. Normative (focus on ideals or ideals plus behavior)*
- 4. Psychological (learning, habit, adjustment, problem-solving device)*
- 5. Structural (focus on the pattern or organization of culture)*
- 6. Genetic (symbols, ideas, artifacts)”* (ibid., 8).

The groupings provide us with a reasonable overview of the different academic disciplines’ foci when describing and using the concept of culture. For the purpose of this research, it is interesting to look into the normative and psychological constructions of culture, as I will be looking into the socio-cognitive implications of the acculturative process that takes place as a result of our usage of social media.

More specifically, as the main focus of this research is social media usage and its connection to global acculturative processes, I will be looking into the aspects of language and behaviors such as viral trends and challenges. These pertain to the understanding of ideals and behavior (i.e. normative focus of culture) and learning and adjustments to new trends, etc. (i.e. psychological focus of culture).

It is important to notice that this research does not understand culture as something only tied to and effected by nationality. Furthermore, this research does not understand culture as something that can be weighed for comparison and categorization in terms of good and bad. Culture is

understood as a fluid and symbiotic concept of which there is no particular right or wrong nor levels of set characteristics that reflect on the individuals of said countries. Nevertheless, it does recognize that there may be some social factors that play part in different national settings, and therefore there can be certain differences across different countries and/or continents. Although, this research only searches to understand the ways in which social media usage has the potential to affect individuals on cognitive and cultural levels globally. – It does not seek to, conclusively and irrevocably, categorize and restrict groups of individuals to the same limited keywords reflecting their ultimate behaviors and understandings.

From this, we will now move on to the theoretical framework that will be used in the analysis.

## 4. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will be introducing the theories that will work as the theoretical framework for my analysis and conceptualization of my data. As mentioned in chapter 3.5., the framework consists of two main theories: *Acculturation* and *Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication (SCT-MC)*. As I am working both inductively and deductively with my data, the theoretical framework will work as a standing point in terms of understanding the main concepts and to be able to reflect on the type of social and/or cultural implications that are part of the global acculturative process proposed in this research. By making use of a theoretical framework of these particular theoretical standpoints, I hope to be able to better understand the concepts that will be presented to me in my data and, that way, be able to conceptualize the data to present a new addition to the theories used in this framework.

Once again, it is important to stress that as SCT-MC – as a part of the individual level of the theory of acculturation – deals with both the general concepts of social cognitive theory as well as the implications of mass communication, this theory will take a substantially bigger part of the theoretical framework. The theory of acculturation will work as the basic framework which SCT-MC complements with crucial concepts.

## 4.1. Acculturation

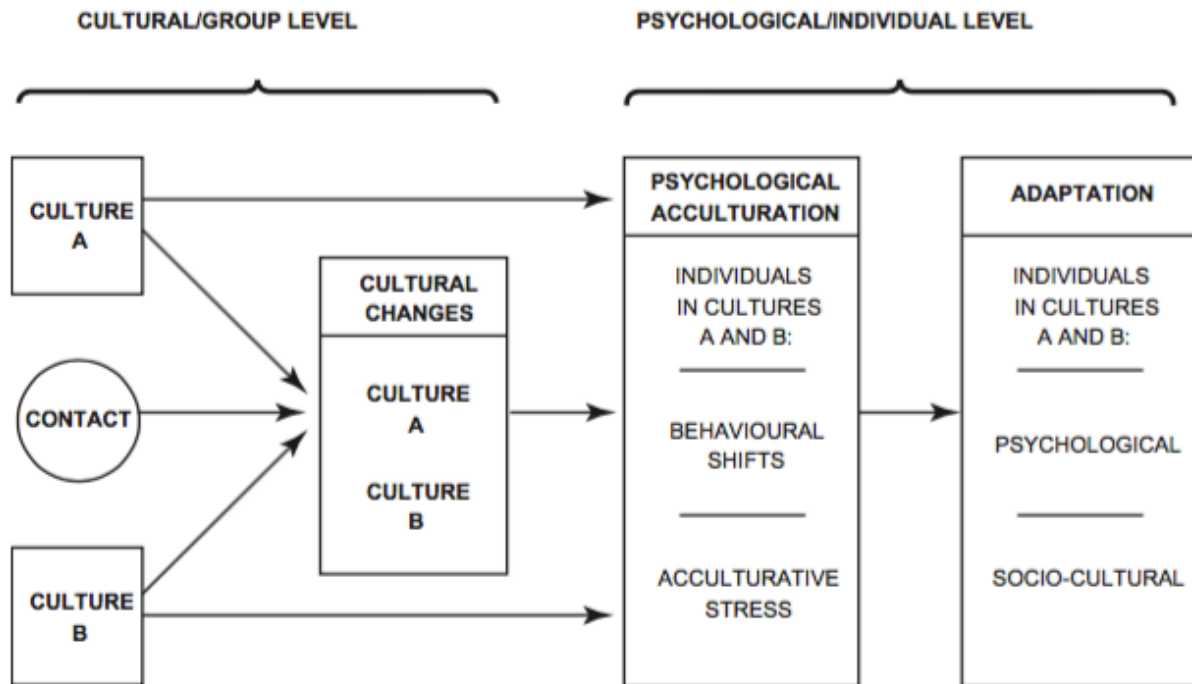
As was mentioned in the literature review, acculturation deals with the socio-cognitive changes that individuals go through when they move from one place to another. It is the phenomenon that takes place when two or more cultures meet:

*“The most widely used definition of acculturation is ‘those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups [...] under this definition acculturation is to be distinguished from [...] assimilation, which is at times a phase of acculturation’” (Sam and Berry 2010, 473).*

As mentioned briefly in the literature review (cf. chapter 2.1.), previously, literature has focused more on the group-level implications of acculturation, but recently, this focus has changed to individual-level implications bringing about theoretical aspects such as psychological acculturation, etc. (ibid., 473). For this study, we will be looking into the general theory of acculturation as the focus of this study is on acculturative implications on both the individual and the group level.

### 4.1.1. Framework of Acculturation

Berry provides a framework to understand the mechanisms that play part in this process of acculturation. The framework also depicts both of the two levels of which acculturation is based on: (1) The Cultural/Group level and (2) the Psychological/Individual level.



**Figure 4** – Framework of Acculturation (Sam and Berry 2010, 474)

The figure above shows the separate parts of Culture A and B before they are in contact with each other. The original cultures that meet are important to highlight and understand in terms of determining the level of acculturation and which cultural and social traits will be dominant in the individual (ibid., 473).

Furthermore, as we see on the figure, both cultures in the process will have cultural changes as acculturation is a *“two-way interaction, resulting in actions and reactions to the contact situation”* (ibid.)

#### 4.1.1.1. Group Level of Acculturation

One the group level of the framework, first see the two cultures (Culture A and B) depicted. Understanding the key features of both these cultures is a crucial aspect in understanding the implications of the acculturative process (Sam and Berry 2010, 473). This level of the framework focuses on the compatibility of the cultures determining different possible relations between the two: Will one culture be more dominant or is there mutual respect or even hostility? (ibid.) The reciprocity of the acculturative process between the two (or more) cultures is also highlighted. – No

one culture will stay without any adoption of either behaviors or values over the other: Both cultures will be affected by the process (ibid.).

As the literature has changed its focus to the individual level, subsequent to this, the focus in the theoretical framework for this thesis will also rely mainly on the individual level.

#### **4.1.1.2. Individual Level of Acculturation**

The right half of the framework represents the individual level of acculturation as there will always be psychological effects on the individual when interacting with a different culture. Furthermore, it is these psychological effects that lead to the adaptation to the new culture and effective changes in behavior which implement aspects of both (or more) cultures.

#### **Psychological Acculturation**

*Psychological acculturation* in the third row of the figure represents the level of change from simple shifts in behavior such as ways of speaking, dressing, and eating (i.e. *behavioral shifts*) to more complex and personal shifts which can lead to *acculturative stress* (i.e. anxiety or higher levels of stress). It is in the process of these different levels of shifts that the individual will adapt to the new cultural setting in which they find themselves (ibid., 474).

Looking further into **acculturative stress**, it is a representation of the emotional aspects of acculturation. The process of acculturation comes with a collection of major life events and changes that can be stressful for the individual. If one is not able to make changes in behavior (i.e. behavioral shifts which I will be getting into later), the process of integration become problematic. Although, it is not all acculturative situations in which we see acculturative stress. – It is based on many different personal factors such as age, gender, and personality: Some studies have found that older immigrants and women are more susceptible to this type of stress (ibid., 474-5).

As for **behavioral shifts**, a major factor is language skills. When someone takes part in a different cultural setting, being able to communicate is the most crucial part in terms of adapting to the culture. The theory assumes a direct link between language skill and socio-cultural adaption (ibid., 475). Language skills entail both verbal and non-verbal communication skills, which means that any

type of symbolic or other communication styles and values are important to learn and adapt to (ibid.).

### **Adaptation: Cognitive Perspectives**

Different from psychological perspectives of acculturation which looks into stress and the emotional feelings of acculturation, the cognitive perspectives are more interested in the personal perception of the individual itself and others (ibid., 475). Though there are cognitive factors that play part in acculturative stress, these factors are mostly referred to the way that people process information about the two groups: *ingroups* and *outgroups*. 'Ingroups' refer to the social and cultural groups from which the person is originally from. 'Outgroups' are the social and cultural groups in which the person now finds itself in contact with. – The perspective also deals with the ways that people categorize themselves and others in relation to these in- and outgroups (ibid.).

As the process of acculturation is a highly complex and multi-layered process, it is difficult to determine and understand all factors with just one theoretical perspective. The cognitive perspectives of acculturation and the model that is presented above looks for the additional aspects of theories that deal with identity or personality in relation to different aspects of social cognitive theories. Acculturation theorists do mention these socio-cognitive positions, but the level of analysis into the socio-cognitive mechanisms of individuals in relation to change is still limited. To look further into such the effects of change, we will now look into Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication.

## **4.2. Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication (SCT-MC)**

Albert Bandura developed Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication (SCT-MC) based on the idea that humans are not driven by only internal impulses or environmental forces, but that there are different mechanisms that play part in the change and evolution of the human mind. This comes from the fact that humans are self-reflective, proactive, and self-organizing according to the context in which they find themselves. – Bandura calls this the 'agentic perspective' which implies that



people will continuously change their perspectives and, ultimately, understandings on their own accord (Bandura 2001, 266).

#### **4.2.1. Cognitive Abilities of the Human Mind**

More interesting to the focus of this research, is that – as the mind is perceived as elastic and fluid – it is ever-changing based on the social contexts in which a person finds themselves. This indicates capabilities of the human mind which represent the ways in which we observe, are motivated, and react to different social contexts. These include four capabilities: (1) Symbolizing capabilities, (2) Self-regulatory capabilities, (3) Self-reflective capabilities, and (4) Vicarious capabilities (Bandura 2001, 266). These four capabilities are then further substantiated by different mechanisms that play part in the way in which the human understanding and social reality is affected.

##### **4.2.1.1. Symbolizing Capabilities**

Of symbolizing capabilities, Bandura states: *“It is with symbols that people process and transform transient experiences into cognitive models that serve as guides for judgment and action”* (Bandura 2001, 267). The ability that humans possess for symbolization allows us to comprehend our surroundings in a highly advanced way which affects every aspect of our lives. Such cognitive factors, Bandura says, will determine which *“events will be observed, what meaning will be conferred on them, whether they leave any lasting effects, what emotional impact and motivating power they will have, and how the information they convey will be organized for future use”* (ibid.). These cognitive understandings are then used to create cognitive models which will work as guides for future events as well as dictate the way in which the individual will judge and act on later situations.

In relation to social media, it is with symbols that we can communicate across countries and time zones. Interesting to this research, social cognitive theory is very interested in the social aspects of such cognitive capabilities and their causal relationship (ibid.).

It is from symbolizing capabilities that all the other cognitive capabilities are derived.

##### **4.2.1.2. Self-regulatory Capabilities**

It is not right to say that people simply know and perform, as Bandura puts it. Humans ability to self-react and direct is a very important cognitive ability that people have. These abilities come from the

self-regulatory capabilities and processes through which motivation, affect, and action are operated. The self-regulatory aspect comes into play as these processes affect the way that we motivate ourselves to reach higher and bigger goals. Motivation, though, is a very individual and internal process: Each person needs to reflect on the positives and negatives of their behavior. – These are based on the reactions that they receive from their surroundings. People will set a goal for themselves based on the reaction that they have received before and believe to receive in the future. As future events cannot in itself have any motivational effect on the individual, Bandura adds the additional dimension of *forethought*. Humans have the ability of *forethought* which allows us to manifest the expectation and consequences of future events into our present mind. This means that our interpretation and understanding of what might happen in the future (i.e. what reactions we will be met with in relation to our behaviors) is used in present time as a self-regulative capability.

The way that this might affect the way we use social media is basing the motivation and self-regulation on the reactions that we expect to receive to our behaviors online. The better the response, the bigger the motivation to act in those ways. Therefore, the correlation between social media and the culture of 'likes', 'repost', as well as commenting, and the way that we behave would be high according to these self-regulatory and self-reflective capabilities.

#### **4.2.1.3. Self-reflective Capabilities**

Self-reflective capabilities are different from self-regulatory capabilities in the sense that they concern the internal reflection of behavior that people go through *after* the actual behavior. This means that people will decide on a behavior based on the outcomes that they believe will come from it (which is processed by self-regulatory capabilities), and then, based on the actual outcome of the behavior (i.e. the reactions received, etc.), they will change their previous understanding of the behavior. This ability ensures the constant change of human behavior as we are reflecting on and adjusting our beliefs based on the outcomes of each behavior. This means that people will either accept or refute a belief or thought based on reality (Bandura 2001, 269). Bandura distinguishes between four different thought verification processes:

- *Enactive verification*: Matching one's thought with the outcome of one's action upon them  
– i.e. the process of verifying one's beliefs by 'testing them out' on your own

- *Vicarious verification*: Matching one's thought with the outcome of other's actions in the surrounding environment – i.e. the process of verifying by observing others
- *Social verification*: Matching one's thoughts with others' thoughts – i.e. the process of verifying one's beliefs
- *Logical verification*: Matching one's thoughts with known outcomes of it – i.e. the process of verifying by deduction (ibid.).

All four verification processes are vital to human agency. As Bandura puts it: *"Unless people believe that they can produce desired effects and forestall undesired ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act"* (ibid., 270).

#### **4.2.1.4. Vicarious Capabilities**

People are individual beings, but people are not based on individual autonomies: We learn and understand together with others and from each other. The ability to do this is based on our vicarious capabilities. In relation to cultural and societal developments, the vicarious capabilities of humans are what has allowed the wide reach and speed of these developments. This way cultural and social understandings and standards can be distributed to bigger groups of people (nations, social groups, etc.) rather than changing the individual understanding one by one (Bandura 2001, 270-271).

This is interesting for this research as we are looking into a global acculturation in which several groups of people are changing their beliefs and behaviors based on the symbolic and/or other communication that takes place on social media. Bandura mentions the effect of 'electronic acculturation' which is the symbolic communication that takes place online. Today, the online world is taking a part of most of our daily lives and this notion is therefore even more relevant, as social media plays a significant role in the shaping of our social understandings and standards (ibid. 271).

#### **4.2.2. Social Construction of Reality: Modeling influence**

As we are looking into the effect of social media, it is very important to look into the possible cognitive effects that such media can have on the individual (as well as groups). Bandura mentions that televised representations of social relations, human nature, and the norms and structure of

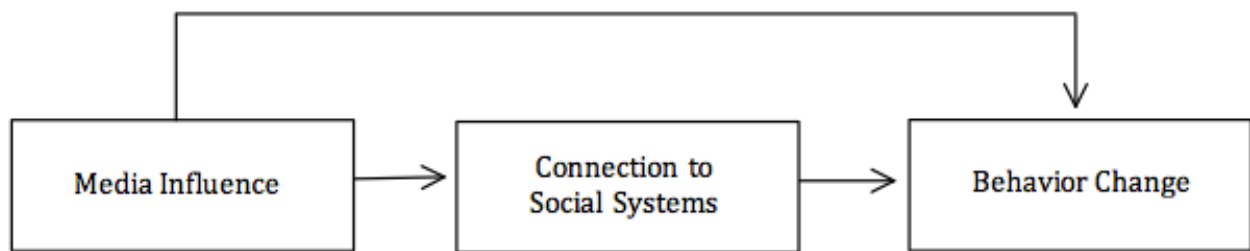
society can affect the beliefs regarding these of people that are constantly exposed to it (Bandura 2001, 281). *“Verification of personal conceptions against televised versions of social reality can thus foster some collective illusions”* (ibid., 282). It is important to note that, as the source is from 2001, it is deemed appropriate to believe that these factors and mechanisms are heightened today when social media and other electronic means for mass communication is an even more prominent part of our every day-lives.

Another aspect of human behavior is what Bandura calls the *social prompting of human behavior*. This is different from observational learning as it does not involve acquiring a *new* behavior, but it involves joining a behavior that is already represented as socially acceptable as well as achievable by **modeling influences** (ibid.). An example of this that is used by Bandura is getting people to act altruistically; e.g. donating money to a charity, etc. This is done by such symbolic communication as the one we see on mass communication (or social media), which shows that there are positive outcomes that can come from a specific behavior. This phenomenon is also seen in any type of advertising in which people are shown that a certain wine or shampoo will provide a certain good outcome. This takes part in the motivation in the individual to take part in the behavior (i.e. buy and use the product).

From the perspective of social media in particular, such outcome could be the big following and amount of likes that other users have online – which is based on the content that they share (i.e. their behavior online). Individuals will base their understanding of what is deemed good and what brings a good outcome based on the beliefs of the people who are successful and popular online (ibid., 282-283).

#### **4.2.2.1. Dual-link versus Multi-pattern Flow of Influence**

There are different ways that influence can take place – or modeling influences can affect. Modeling influence is usually not considered a singular path of influence, but is the result of multiple determinants operating together. This means that the level of influence as well as the success rate of influence is based on many different determinants. This also means that influence can change with further experience (ibid., 284). With the power of mass communication, *“[h]uman judgment, values, and conduct can be altered directly by televised modeling without having to wait for an influential intermediary to adopt what has been shown and then to serve as the diffuser to others”* (ibid., 284).



**Figure 5 – Dual Paths of Influence (Bandura 2001, 285)**

As we see on the figure above, behavior change can happen as a direct connection to media influence. To change the judgment, values, and conduct of individuals, you do not need the intermediary element which will implement these values to then instill in individuals. For this reason, media is a very important component in the social, cultural, and political changes that we see around the global. With the element of global social media, these changes are now not only seen on national levels but also on global levels. The middle component on the model represents the part in which people determine that there is a lot of investment involved in terms of time and resources – as well as potential of failure. In such cases, people will usually look for “*verification of functional value*” from other places before they commit to an action or belief (ibid., 284).

#### **4.2.2.2. Social Diffusion through Symbolic Modeling**

A very significant factor of model influence is that it is not only affecting the individual but can also affect larger groups, which was mentioned earlier. Using mass communication media, we are able to reach a virtually limitless amount of people all at the same time. This means that with mass communication media as a tool through which cultural, social, or any other types of aspects of society can be influenced. – And as such media are continuously growing, the way in which societies evolve is only more and more affected by the mechanisms of mass communication, what Bandura refers to as the *social diffusion process* (Bandura 2001, 287).

Such social diffusion of changes in behavior are analyzed based on **three constituent processes** and their corresponding factors: (1) the acquisition of knowledge about new behaviors (i.e. *Modeling Determinants*), (2) the adoption of such behaviors in practice (i.e. *Adoption Determinants*), and (3)

the social networks that were used to share and support the behaviors (i.e. *Social Networks and Flow*) (ibid.). These will be explained further below.

### **Modeling Determinants**

Simply acquiring knowledge does not mean that a person will act on this new knowledge. Therefore, the way that the knowledge is shared and received is crucial. – This refers to **Modeling Determinants**. First of all, in terms of media, adoption of behavior is based on the level of exposure that people have to the information and examples of the behavior. Second of all, the innovative knowledge needs to be easy to understand: All people do not have the same skills and resources and, therefore, the rate of behavior adoption varies from different social groups. The level of motivation to act a certain way, as was mentioned earlier, is based on the belief that you can be successful doing it as well as have a positive outcome, which is why the model influences must “*be designed to build self-efficacy as well as convey knowledge and rules of behavior*” (ibid., 288).

Bandura explains that the diffusion of innovative (or new) knowledge follows a common pattern: The behavior is introduced by way of example. In the beginning the acceptance and adoption of the behavior will be slow, as people will usually reject new ideas as they are unfamiliar. Yet, as more and more people adopt the behavior, the speed of adaptation will accelerate exponentially for a period until it slows down again. The diffusion rate will either stabilize or decline based on the ‘relative functional value’ (ibid., 290).

### **Adoption Determinants**

Mechanisms that determine whether or not people will adopt the presented innovative knowledge are based on whether or not people believe that they will be successful in the act as mentioned earlier. – Also called **Adoption Determinants**. This can be based on several different mechanisms such as environmental inducements. It can also be based on incentive influence which is commonly seen on mass communication media. Such incentives can be based on material, social, or personal outcomes. – As Bandura states: “*The greater the relative benefits provided by an innovation, the higher the incentive is to adopt it*” (ibid., 289). Another form of incentive comes in the form of status. Such incentive forms are believed to be the main motivators in most cases of adopting innovative behavior. When we use social status as the main incentive, the behavior is more desired even if the

resources needed are extensive. The desire to feel 'above' the 'common' is natural in humans, and, therefore, plays an important part in the motivation to change behavior. Once the new behavior becomes spread out and common, though, the behavior loses its status and new behavior takes its place (ibid., 290).

Adoptive determinants also rely on the compatibility of the new behavior with current social norms and values (i.e. **self-evaluative reactions**). – The more compatible the new behavior is to people's original values, the higher the chance of a change.

Lastly, a significant characteristic is whether or not a new behavior is subject to a trial: whether or not people can try the behavior with low or no cost: *"The more weight given to potential risks and the costs of getting rid of new practices should they fail to live up to expectations, the weaker the incentive to innovate is"* (ibid.).

### **Social Networks and Flow of Diffusion**

As the third major factor in the process of social diffusion, we find the **structures of our social networks**. These networks concern the relationships that people have, which include family, co-workers, and any friend group that a person may be directly or indirectly in contact with. This aspect of behavioral change is crucial, as people rely on their social network to gain new knowledge. It is also through their networks that they will see the personal outcomes of behaviors which will affect their self-regulative behaviors, etc. mentioned earlier in the chapter (cf. chapter 4.2.1.2.; chapter 4.2.1.3.). Each social group that one is in connection with will have a different function in terms of adopting innovative behavior (ibid., 291). Bandura also mentions that people with bigger social ties will usually show a higher rate of adoptive behavior. – As people can use their social network to both see examples of innovative behavior in their associates as well as talk about the behaviors, the chances of adopting innovating behavior are substantially higher. People will also feel more secure in the positive outcome of a behavior – and therefore more motivated – if they are presented by people in their social networks (ibid.).

All in all, the two theories will complement each other in terms of explaining the process of change when people find themselves in different cultural or social settings (or medias). SCT-MC takes up a bigger proportion of the theoretical framework in terms of mechanisms and concepts, as this is the

theory that also allows us to understand the way in which mass communication plays a part in social and individual change. As mentioned earlier, this focus and understanding is crucial for the purpose of this research.

In relation to the theoretical framework and the assumption of this research that acculturative processes do indeed take place online, the platforms Facebook and Instagram will be seen as the new culture that individuals are becoming a part of. The original cultures are all different to the respective individual. This analysis will be looking into the processes that happen *after* these different cultures meet: i.e. the second half (psychological/individual levels) of the acculturative process presented in the framework. These findings will, in turn, help understand the implications on the group level of the framework in terms of the way that the new culture presents itself and reforms.

In the next chapter, the theoretical framework will be used to analyze and conceptualize the collected data which was presented in chapter 3.4.

## 5. Analysis

To be able to conceptualize the information found in our data, I will go through the interview data thematically. The survey data will be used as a contributing analytical point in terms of discussing the language use online. Firstly, the collected data will be analyzed based on the theoretical framework to highlight any socio-cultural implications. The theoretical implications will then be discussed further in the discussion-chapter (cf. chapter 6).

As mentioned earlier (cf. chapter 3.3.2.6.: Interview Analysis.), **four main recurring phenomena** were found from the collected interview data: (1) All respondents use some level of English in their posts (2) All respondents were aware of their likes (i.e. following the amount of likes and who had given them), (3) All respondents had tried to take part in a ‘viral challenge’ or ‘viral trend’, and (4) All respondents had made behavioral choices offline based on online inspiration/influence.



Firstly, this chapter will be started off with a preliminary sub-chapter (cf. **chapter 5.1.**) looking into the survey results answering the question of the primary use of social media accounts. This will help me understand how certain behaviors may have a connection with the ways that we use the platforms. After this, the four phenomena mentioned above will be used as the main structure of the analysis making up the sub-chapters: **5.2. Use of English**, **5.3. Awareness of “likes”**, **5.4. Viral Trends**, and **5.5. Influence**.

## **5.1. Main Use of Social Media Platforms**

As an introduction, to better understand the use of the platforms, I will look into the data that was collected from the survey looking into answering the first supporting research question: *“What is the primary use of social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook?”* When asked of their primary use of the two social media platforms in the survey, we saw that 46.53 percent of the answers said that the primary use of Facebook was for socializing, 18.06 percent said for news, whereas 15.28 percent said for entertainment. Although, interestingly enough, we see a difference in the answers for Instagram: When asked of the primary use of Instagram, only 27.08 percent of users chose socializing, 4.17 percent said news, whereas all of 52.08 percent of users answered entertainment.

Based on these answers, we can see that there is reason to believe that there would be a possibility of social implications from the use of both platforms.

Because of the high percentage of people using Instagram for entertainment, it can have an effect on the levels of influence. – If the platform is mostly used for entertainment, the more prevalent attitude toward using the platforms must also be positive: If people are entertained, they are happy. Because of this, there is reason to believe that a higher level of influence can be found in terms of social and cultural behaviors such as humor, values, and communication. For Facebook, on the other hand, we see that the main use has higher results focusing on socializing. This will have implications on the ways that we interact with each other online. Where Instagram is more focused on the individual shifts in behavior, Facebook may have higher implications on the group level in terms of implementing different ways of communication.

## 5.2. Use of English

In relation to respondents' use of English on Facebook and/or Instagram, the survey data showed that 35.42 percent of all the respondents used English once or more in their last four posts on Facebook, whereas, on Instagram, this percentage was 56 percent. This is a clear indication of behavioral shifts in terms of language use for many that are active on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Behavioral shifts like this, as we know from the theoretical framework (cf. chapter 4), are also directly linked to socio-cognitive implications as it can affect social and cultural understandings as well as smaller behaviors such as humor, etc. We do see a significant difference between the use of English on the two platforms. This could be a result of the nature of the use of the platforms. We know from the previous sub-chapter that the primary use of Facebook is predominantly for socializing, whereas, for Instagram, it was for entertainment. Because Facebook is, to a large extent, used for socializing, the lower percent of use of English on the platform may be because users are connecting with family members as well as friends who share the same first language as themselves.

Although, if we look at the interviews and the answers that were provided in terms of use of English, all respondents mentioned that they will use at least some English, as their contacts and 'followers' online are from different parts of the world. The use of English becomes a question of not 'leaving someone out': *"Even though Korean is my mother-tongue, I didn't want to exclude my non-Koreans from my posts"* (cf. **Appendix 5**) and *"But I also Use English a lot because I have followers Who don't understand Bosnian or Danish"* (cf. **Appendix 7**). Because the world is getting more globalized in terms of the contacts that people make throughout their lives, the use of English could become something that is needed to be used to be able to reach all of one's 'followers' or acquaintances. As a result, though, this seems to have become a norm online in which people are more inclined to use English to communicate their thoughts, etc. This behavioral shift in relation to communication is very crucial if we look at acculturation. As Sam and Berry (2010) mention, language skills and being able to communicate in the new cultural setting (in this case; the social media platforms) are the major factor in determining whether or not the users will adapt to the setting.

Ultimately, as the things that are shared online are based on people's emotions and achievements that they are proud of, the use of English in these situations can have an effect on the thought process during such events that are 'shareable'. This means that when people are accustomed to

use a specific language to explain specific events or to share specific feelings, the processing of such events and feelings are accustomed to the language as well. This is an indirect acculturative effect on the individual level in terms of behavioral shifts as mentioned earlier. Furthermore, the actual use of English online (as a result of a more global reach in one's contacts) is an indication of an acculturative change on the group level as it is a result of the different cultures meeting and finding a way of communication that includes everyone.

An interesting thing to note from the interview data was that two of the four respondents used abbreviations and popular terms from online. We know from current literature that the use of slang and abbreviations has become a new language that came from the use of online media and text messaging (cf. chapter 2.2.). From the interviews, we see that Interviewee D used the abbreviation "LMAO" (Laugh My Ass Off) nine times while answering the questions (cf. **Appendix 8**). Along with the abbreviation "LMAO", Interviewee C also used the abbreviation "tbh" (to be honest) two times (cf. **Appendix 7**). Current literature mentions that the use of such language is a part in creating a feeling of community and belonging on the specific medias. Current literature also states that this use of slang does not interfere with the use of English in itself. From the interview, though, we see an indication that this use of language (i.e. slang) has become a part of regular English use for these two interviewees. – I.e. The use of "online language" has become a part of the respondent's language use even outside of social media. Even though the interview was performed in English, the setting was not of a social setting, and, therefore, this could be an indication of a change in behavior in terms of language which, in turn, is an indication that there could be a modification of the subjects' original cultures (i.e. the culture of the place in which they physically live in) as a result of contact with the online culture. Once again, we know from our theoretical framework that acculturation is a "*two-way interaction*" which could also be an indication of what Appadurai's 'cultural flows' (cf. chapter 2.1.)

There seems to be a clear indication that the users of the globalized platforms use English as the common language for communication. This common language on social media has come about as to not exclude certain followers or friends that may not speak the mother-tongue of the individual posting. This, in turn, has implications on the general language use and communicative preferences of the individuals (e.g. use of abbreviations first started on social media are used outside of social

media as well). The use of English and – most importantly – slang (incl. abbreviations) can have implications on the way that people process and take part in humor, as Zappavigna (2012) also found to be the case. Furthermore, according to the theoretical framework, this change of language can have communicative and socio-cognitive implications on the individual changing in terms of other behaviors as well as beliefs. To look further into this, I will now move onto the next found recurring phenomenon.

### 5.3. Awareness of “likes”

Another phenomenon that was noticed when looking through the interview data was the fact that all respondents mentioned that they were – to some extent – aware of the number of likes that they would receive on the posts that they upload on the two platforms; Facebook and Instagram. This sub-chapter will look into the social implications of this awareness, and how the focus on ‘likes’ can change the characteristics and nature of relationships both online and offline.

Hopefully, this will help answer the second part of my research questions regarding which ways the use of social media affects the socio-cognitive states of the individual.

As an example, when asked whether or not the respondent kept track of likes on a new post, Interviewee A states:

*“I do keep track of likes. After posting, I constantly go back to see how many likes I got, and the frequency of it is very high. It is as often as every 5 minutes to every 1 hour. I know it’s not very healthy that way, but I just can’t stop keeping track of likes. I think it’s because I somehow see ‘likes’ as a social status – something that shows how good/popular [a] person you are among friends. (cf. **Appendix 5**) (own underlining)*

It is clear to see that the ‘likes’ on social media has become a big part of users’ activity online. It even goes to the point where it becomes a tool for the understanding and perception of self as we see stated in the quote above: *“I somehow see ‘likes’ as a social status – something that shows how good/popular [a] person you are among friends.”* – Even if users are on the social media platforms only to interact with their friends, the simple use of it can determine and establish a sort of hierarchy

and competition in which the number of likes and comments becomes the scale on which it is measured. In relation to SCT-MC, such behaviors can be an indication of self-regulatory capabilities: If people believe that the number of likes will determine their level of popularity, they use this as motivation for certain behaviors that can help realize a positive outcome.

Additionally, when asked about the thought-process that they go through when uploading something on either platform, Interviewee A provides five points:

- “1. I think this is Instagram-able and I want to post this special day of mine*
- 2. Which photo will get me the most likes?*
- 3. I should edit it a little bit and put filters on to make it look prettier*
- 4. Will people think I am living a good life? Will they get envious?*
- 5. How many likes would I be getting? What comments would I be getting?” (cf. Appendix 5)*

All five points show signs of forethought as the interviewee tries to imagine how the post will be received. In relation to this, what seems to be a result of self-regulatory capabilities can be seen in point 3: In the middle of the process, Interviewee A regulates the behavior by adding filters to the picture (i.e. to enhance its potential value in terms of positive outcome).

Particularly point two, four, and five directly pertains to the issue of forethought relating the actual outcome of the behavior. The interviewee shows motivation to act according to their belief of what is acceptable (i.e. “Instagram-able”) on the platform. The term “Instagram-able” used in the quote is an indication of an understood standard of what is acceptable and what would provide a positive outcome (of likes and comments) on the platform. This, in itself, shows that social standards and norms are in place being an indication of a society or culture by itself. Consequently, it leads to a collective understanding of certain values and ‘likeable behavior’ across the platforms which – as we know – includes users from all over the world. Such changes in values online can easily lead to a change in values offline as well as the users will accustom to these. With the understanding of socio-cognitive behaviors, users will be able to be affected to change behaviors in any aspect of their lives when influenced by mass communication (i.e. social media). Furthermore, more interestingly, this change of values (and, ultimately, behaviors) will also be a collective phenomenon across borders.

In relation to the research by Ferwerda et al. looking into the correlation between the use of filters and personalities (cf. chapter 2.2.), this shows that the relationship between these two variables may, in fact, be the opposite of what is suggested in the previous research: It seems as though users are affected by social media to add a filter that is “acceptable.” This means that the filter is more likely a result of online modeling influence and forethought based on motivation to succeed (i.e. gain likes) rather than the original personality of the individual.

The motivation to upload posts that the users believe will be ‘successful’ is something that we see to be present with all the interviewees. Another way that this is depicted is when Interviewee A writes:

*“Sometimes, I go to the point where I count the estimated number likes. If I don’t get enough likes, my mind goes to thinking ‘I press ‘like’ for A all the time, so A will be pressing ‘like’ for me soon’ or ‘B must be busy now, when B sees my post, he/she must press like for me which would make XX likes for my post’.”* (cf. **Appendix 5**)

It seems as though the ‘likes’ becomes something of a ‘give and take’-relationship between the users on social media platforms. This could be a result of the value that the ‘like’ is given: If you give someone a certain value, then you expect the value to be returned at some point. Furthermore, it shows that there are also behavioral shifts in terms of interaction with other followers: The interaction between users becomes reciprocal on some levels in which the users help one another to gain higher status or succeed in behaviors online. Furthermore, the reciprocal relationship also can be an indication of behaviors that are taken part of to be further enhance the chances of positive outcome for oneself. – Likes are not necessarily given as a legitimate ‘like’, but merely as a guarantee of gaining likes in the future as well.

The awareness of likes becomes visible even before the users upload any posts. When asked whether or not they consider the time of day in relation to uploading a new post, Interviewees A, B, and C all said that they do consider the time, whereas Interviewee D mentions that they used to but have now stopped. All mention that this was because they consider whether or not people would be able to see their posts, if they upload at a time at which they are less likely to be online: As

Interviewee A says: *"I tend to post it when I think is the time that everyone is free (i.e., after 6pm when the majority of people are off work)"* (cf. **Appendix 5**). Interviewee C also mentions algorithms: *"If I would post anything late in the evening, maybe no one would see my post because of algorithms"* (cf. **Appendix 7**).

The awareness and consideration of such things, once again, shows forethought from the users in terms of expecting a certain outcome from sharing a post within a specific timeframe. The fact that we see this type of behavior and focus on the possibilities of likes and comments from friends and other users online can have an impact on the way that these users behave offline. In terms of social and cultural values and behaviors, the users will end up calculating their behaviors offline (i.e. where they go, with who and how they spend their time, how they dress, etc.) by the prospect of capturing the behavior and posting it online. Additionally, this can have significant implications on the relations between people offline as these values and measurements of it can become a part of how we see each other. Such implications will be further discussed in the last sub-chapter discussing 'Inspiration.'

## 5.4. Viral Trends

As an extension to the previous sub-chapter, this chapter will try to look into the interviewees' behaviors in relation to viral trends. This will be done in order to further highlight the ways that the use of social media affects the socio-cognitive stances of the individual. This is a very interesting aspect to discuss as it has a direct influence on the behaviors of users online. All of the respondents mentioned that they had taken part of some sort of behavior that they had encountered online. In relation to SCT-MC, the ways in which people are affected is an example of social diffusion. For example, at the time of writing this research, a certain coffee (the Dalgona coffee) had been very popular on social media. It had first emerged on the popular platform Tik-Tok<sup>1</sup> which is why it is also known as 'the Tik-Tok coffee'. Interviewee D mentions having tried out the coffee:

*"The [D]algona coffee, which I saw everyone making on Instagram. First I was a bit skeptical, but I saw everyone doing it and I got tired of the coffee at home, so I thought*

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<sup>1</sup> A social media platform where users share creative "short-form mobile videos" (TikTok 2020)

*why not. I googled how it is made and I was like damn this is easy I can try this and I did. I actually ended up making it quite a few times and making my own variations.”*  
(cf. **Appendix 8**) (own underlining)

It is clear from the quote above that because the interviewee had been seeing it so much, they ended up joining the behavior indicating high levels of modeling determinants. This is a clear indication of social diffusion online. We know that the adoption of behavior is based, most of all, on the level of exposure, and this example demonstrates a situation in which the user was widely exposed to a trend and changed behavior accordingly. Looking further into the answer, Interviewee D continues saying: *“If it had been more complicated to make I would most likely not have done it”* (cf. **Appendix 8**). Here, we move into the adoption determinants as the receiver of the information (i.e. the social media user) believes that they are capable of succeeding in the behavior. Evidently, Interviewee D believed that they would be able to succeed or, at least, that the potential risks were low enough. Additionally, looking back to the original quote above, Interviewee D states: *“[...] and I got tired of the coffee at home, so I thought why not.”* This is an indication of self-reflective capabilities. The user evaluates the new behavior based on their original values and behaviors. – Should the new behavior not be too far off from what they originally know; the chances of adoption are substantially higher. Here, we see an indication that Interviewee D already had an original behavior that would allow easy adoption of the new behavior.

Interviewee C, on the other hand, mentioned trying to make it but the outcome was not successful: *“I tried to do the New Tik-Tok coffee and I failed miserably. So now I have stopped following trends”* (cf. **Appendix 7**). It seems that Interviewee C’s self-evaluative reaction has been to deem the adoption of such behavioral trends not achievable. Failing the behavior has meant that the motivational levels of Interviewee C has dropped.

The fact that both users were already familiar with the basic behavior, they were able to take part in it easily and the motivation was high due to low risk of failure. Such trends with low risks seem to be the norm on social media platforms like Instagram. In terms of the implications that this can have on the users online, it can very easily alter the values and behaviors of large groups of people one small behavior at a time. This way, people become more and more susceptible to the changes and taking part of the new behaviors will be more and more frequent as the risks are reduced and the



level of success is seen to be high from other users. The interpretation of the level of success comes as a result of the changed perception of status which has become based on the amount of likes. From this, the cultural and social standpoints of social media users can change significantly in their lives offline, as well.

Additionally, when looking at viral trends, we also find the trend of “viral challenges.” There are different reactions from the interviewees to the viral challenges and behaviors online. For example, we do see resistant behavior from one of the interviewees, Interviewee B, who makes the following comment:

*“NO... I think it is ridiculous and appears like a [T]rojan horse. People are so stupid and obviously bored. However, I often “tag” family and friends in some of funny stuff that we can relate to or discounts at a relevant store, and I share post via messenger when it has some meaning to something like an exciting dish, movie clip, discount, new thing-ish.” (cf. **Appendix 6**)*

The quote above is an answer to the question of whether or not the interviewee has ever taken part of any viral challenge. From the answer, we see that there is a difference in terms of what behaviors are taken part in: We see that Interviewee B has strong feelings against taking part of the bigger viral challenges but chooses to participate in other behaviors that take place on social media platforms such as sending ‘funny stuff’ to friends and family or sharing things that “*has some meaning to something.*” Here, we see an example of the way that people will take part in things behaviors that have some connection or closeness to values or behaviors that the – in this case – user already had prior to being introduced to these behaviors. This is a clear example of the ways that the societies on social media platforms act differently than the societies we know offline: Individuals can choose to not take part in norms and mainstream behavior and values. If, indeed, the behaviors that take place online, such as viral/online challenges, cause too much stress for Interviewee B in terms of being able to properly accustom to them (i.e. succeeding in them), then Interviewee B simply chooses to not take part. This could be an indication of a type of acculturative

behavior in which sub-cultures are made. Such sub-cultures prominently will be different from the main culture, but will still take part in some basic tendencies and behaviors.

Interviewee B's resistance could also be an indication of the type of behavioral implications of social media in which behaviors lose their status because a lot of people are doing it. Bandura mentions that the decline of the behavior usually relies on the 'relative functional value' of said behavior. With Interviewee B, we see that they clearly do not believe that the functional value of such challenges is high enough to adopt the behavior: It doesn't have "*some meaning to it*" (cf. **Appendix 6**).

Although, Interviewee B does mention that they have taken part in an online trend (not "challenge") called "Throwback Thursdays". This trend involves sharing a good/fun memory in the form of a picture from a long time ago on Thursdays. This indicates that there is some behavioral adoption from Interviewee B as well. This could also be another indication of the selective mindset in terms of values and behaviors that Interviewee B showcases. Earlier, I mentioned the formation of sub-cultures (subsequently creating in-groups and out-groups) within the main cultural setting of the respective social media platforms. Interviewee B clearly shows that they have taken part of some trends and 'challenges' with success and does not seem negative towards these behaviors.

This raises the question of whether or not acculturative processes on social media have less or no implications of the level of stress (i.e. acculturative stress) in terms of the notion of "fitting in". The stress caused from social media seems more focused on the level of success in terms of gaining status and value (i.e. likes, etc.). Perhaps because the behaviors on social media such as trends and challenges have a smaller stake in terms of risk and skill requirement, it further affects the level of (or lack thereof) acculturative stress that users experience. Social media allows to not take part in all behaviors. This we also saw from the survey, where 24 percent of respondents said that they had no posts on Facebook and 8 percent said the same in relation to their Instagram accounts. Posting on the platforms is deemed the original and main behavior of the platforms, yet the lack of adoption of that behavior shows that the social rules online may be very different than the social rules in offline societies in relation to acculturation.

The notion of not taking part of certain trends or behaviors may not have any major effects on the trend itself. Here, the main size and reach of social media is crucial: As the platforms reach as many people as they do, some not taking part of certain trends will not, as such, eliminate the trend whatsoever. By being a part of the platform, the individual will still, most certainly, be subjected to the trend in some way or another, and will have to take whatever stand in terms of it: This, by default, makes the individual part of the trend as being a part of the discussion *of it*.

All in all, it seems as though there are some behaviors that are more easily adopted by users such as common viral trends (i.e. 'low-risk' behaviors). On the other hand, bigger viral challenges seem to be less likely to be adopted by the interviewees. This could be an indication of the level of commitment, resources, abilities that are required to take part of these behaviors are higher. That said, there is still an understanding that general norms and trends on the social media platforms are more easily adopted and all users have shown a change in behavior in terms of trends as a result of being active on said platforms. This can be an indication of different 'mixtures' of the cultures as the users are not from the same original cultural and/or social backgrounds. – This relates back to the group level of the model of acculturation in which the two (or more) cultures meet. This way, the aspect of acculturative stress does not play the same part as it does in acculturative processes that are part of current literature. Here, we see that acculturative stress – though it may take place – does not have the same implications as it would in regular acculturative processes: As there are different sub-groups and sub-cultures within the platforms, there are also different nuances to expected behavior. Furthermore, it is interesting to discuss the aspect of the fact that this is behavior that is rooted in an online society. The users are still part of their own, original offline societies and in this way are not disconnected from it as one would be with 'regular' acculturative processes. This will be discussed further in the following sub-chapter.

## **5.5. Inspiration/Influence**

In this last sub-chapter, we will be looking into the concept of 'inspiration' online, and the implications that this online inspiration or influence can have on behaviors offline. When looking into the theme of 'inspiration' or 'influence', there are different layers that are interesting to look

into. First of all, most of my Interviewees mentioned following celebrities or ‘influencers’ online. The following of influencers in itself is an indication of inspiration from social media. From my theoretical framework, we understand that people base their knowledge of what is deemed good and what brings a good outcome based on the actions of the people who are successful and popular online. Influencers, by default, are popular and successful online, and, therefore, I understand them to take up an important part in the acculturative process of online social platforms.

There are different ways that online influence can have implications on the values and behaviors of users offline. Firstly, when looking into the personal values of users, we see that Interviewee D mentions that they have started posting “stupid pictures” of themselves online as a result of following an influencer:

*“Maya Jama<sup>2</sup> gave me the courage to post stupid pictures of myself on my stories LMAO. Jokes aside, I have always believed that self-irony is an important quality to have, especially on Instagram, where influencers has set the scene and everything has to be perfect.” (cf. **Appendix 8**)*

The above quote shows that this was a quality or value that was already part of Interviewee D, but the specific behavior of posting “*stupid pictures*” came about as a reaction to the exposure to it from the influencer. This is another indication of using vicarious verification to weigh the possible outcome of the behavior. – It could also be a case of social verification, in which the user matches their thoughts with others’ thoughts. In both cases, the user will either verify or reject some values or understandings that they already possess. This quote also shows a good example of how people will be more susceptible to change a behavior, if it is already not too far away from their original values and beliefs. More importantly, this verification of this specific value can have implications on the overall values of the user offline, as well. Interviewee D adopting the behavior of posting “stupid pictures” of herself is not just an indication of a specific behavior (i.e. posting a certain type of picture), it is also an indication of a social value of what is deemed appropriate and valuable. In this case, the value is about beauty and self-confidence. Such a change in values online can have

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<sup>2</sup> British television and radio host (The Sun 2019)

implications on the values of society offline. The indirect link that influencers online have on the ways that societies offline changes are much more significant than previous literature has portrayed it. – This can affect the ways that magazines choose their models and the way they edit, it can affect the expectations we have in terms of partners, and, of course, it can affect the way that we dress as well as the way we discuss certain topics in all levels of society, etc.

More interestingly, another aspect that is reflected upon in the interviews when looking into the theme of inspiration is the direct inspiration to behavioral shifts *outside* of the social media platforms. All respondents mention some type of behavior offline that has been inspired or influenced by online exposure. For example, Interviewee C mentions that they have gone to restaurants or bought things that they saw online: *“I sometimes see a good price on a product or an ‘interesting’ restaurant, and then my wife and I have visited it”* (cf. **Appendix 6**) Another example of this is the viral Dalgona coffee that two of the interviewees had made, which was mentioned earlier. Interviewee D also mentions that they follow influencers, such as fashion and makeup influencers as well as famous musicians and actors. When asked why they follow these influencers in particular, Interviewee D says:

*“Some for fashion inspiration and Muslim influencers for more modest fashion inspiration – it’s nice with a balance. Makeup is to learn tips and tricks, and [Y]outubers because some of them actually have funny content on Instagram too. Musicians and actors I follow to stay updated on film and music, and just to see their extravagant life [...]”* (cf. **Appendix 8**)

This is an indication of direct influence of social media content to the fashion and makeup choices that they user will make outside of social media. The behavioral shift may be a direct link to behavior online as these choices (of fashion and otherwise) will be reflected online should the user post pictures. Although, as a result of this, the behavioral shift will also have implications on the ways that the user dresses as well as behaves outside the social media platforms.

The sentence from Interviewee D; *“[...] on Instagram, where influencers has set the scene and everything has to be perfect”* (cf. **Appendix 8**) is interesting as it portrays the social media platform

as having a social norm or 'rules' that are started and regulated by the influencers on them. These influencers are understood as being the ones with the biggest following and, therefore, the most power in terms of reach and influence. If we compare this behavior – or structure – to 'the offline world', this understanding from Interviewee D could be compared to a type of government body that sets the rules and agendas for the followers and users online. This is an interesting comparison, as it shows how these online platforms have transformed into something more of a social and cultural body of its own. Although, as such, they still reflect back on the offline societies in which the users find themselves. These findings indicate an acculturative process in which societies across the world are all in contact with social media platforms and 'influencers' and, as a consequence, are constantly adapting to the trends and values that are put forward by these influencers. As this development happens, the influence on the offline societies is also developing as a result of this.

The fact that the interviewees show signs that they are affected by online platforms in their offline lives is an indication that the way in which we interact and behave online can have an impact on our values and behaviors offline. This is a further indication of an acculturative process across 'borders' (i.e. between offline and online) in which social and cultural standards and values are transformed globally.

All in all, when we look through the data, we see that there are several indications of cultural and social implications on both the individual and group level. The change of language on social media changes the way that we communicate, for example, with humor. This, consequently, also changes the way that we process events and smaller happenings on- as well as offline. The awareness of likes makes us more prone to think of the ways that other people see us, and, once again, it affects the way that we process as well as behave in certain situations. This implication is then further heightened as a result of being subjected to and participation in viral trends and challenges.

In the next chapter, I will be looking into what these implications can tell us about global acculturation from the perspective of the theoretical framework.

## 6. Discussion: Theoretical Implications

In this chapter, I will be discussing the theoretical implications from the findings presented in the analysis above. From the perspective of the theoretical framework used to analyze the data, we see that there are some acculturative (including socio-cognitive) implications of the use of social media that are not prevalent in the current theories.

Based on the analysis, we can see that the interviewees all have made behavioral shifts as per the understanding of the current theories. The most prominent aspect of the theoretical framework throughout the analysis are the self-regulatory and self-reflective capabilities which affect the level of motivation to take part in or continue a certain behavior online. These capabilities show to be a part of the evidently very significant process of social diffusion and modeling influences online.

Although, the implications that these behavioral shifts have on the surrounding (offline) societies in which the users find themselves are substantial. People are met with different cultures as a result of globalization. We saw that most of the survey respondents and all of the interviewees mention that they use English online. From the interviewees, we found that this was a question of not excluding friends or family members that, for any reason, did not speak the same language as themselves. An example could be a family of refugees in Denmark using English on their social medias to not exclude neither their families in their home country nor their new acquaintances or friends in Denmark. Another example could be people from around the world meeting through traveling, and, to stay connected, “add” each other on social media. – This situation is a result of offline acculturation, consequently affecting the online (or global) acculturation, as well: The more we travel and move around, the bigger the need of online connection making us more susceptible to its influence.

The next level of the process of global acculturation then happens when all of these different cultures meet online, in which we see the culture portrayed and, almost, decided by influencers. It is here that the users are influenced and socio-cultural and cognitive implications take place. First, this will happen online, and then it will lead to offline behavioral change as the adoption of new behaviors become more and more risk-free and familiar. This we saw from the interviewees’ adoption of online social values of ‘likes’ and then, as a result, took part in trends and behaviors that would excel their status (i.e. number of likes) on the platforms. In the end, the users become

accustomed to the values and social messages presented on the platforms and will, consequently, take these values to be a part of their offline status, as well. Furthermore, there is no cultural values that are 'taken back' to the original culture per se, as we are always in both cultures simultaneously: As we live in one country, we are also online on social media at all times. This is a big difference from previous literature as one will always be actively connected to both the new and the original culture.

### **Acculturative Stress**

On this note, we get into the discussion of *acculturative stress*. On the individual level, the understanding of *acculturative stress* seems very different in the global acculturative process. The way in which the social media platforms operate creates a whole new understanding of 'space', 'connection' and 'society.' – We have nothing to relate back to when we look at the structure of social media: If we move to a different country, the country will still have some similarities of our original country; we will understand the basics of their political system, we will understand the infrastructure, the buildings, and the education system. Some things may be different, but there will always be some main ideas or structures that are fundamentally the same. Yet, when we go online, the whole structure is completely different: We do not simply step into a different country, we step into a different universe, altogether. Because of this, one could argue that the level of stress in relation to the contact with this platform (or culture) should be higher, yet the acculturative stress seems to be not present much at all. The phenomenon of global acculturative stress will create stress not to balance the original culture and a host-culture, but to balance two main cultures as both represent the values, behaviors, and understandings of the individual; but in very different ways. For example, when a person emigrates to another country, they are expected to learn the language of that country to be able to perform daily tasks, get a job, meet new people, etc. Online, though, this is not the case: People can use whichever language is most convenient or useful for them. The fact that social media platforms are global means that they do not conform to one single list of behaviors which everyone needs to follow: I.e. Users can choose freely and with no repercussions. Although, users do need to be able to follow the speed of cultural and social changes as the use of the Internet allows for all cultures and languages to meet and merge every day with no long diplomatic processes, etc. Yet again, this notion may be disputed to some extent, as social media operates online. – Because of this, users have the option to go offline at any given moment.



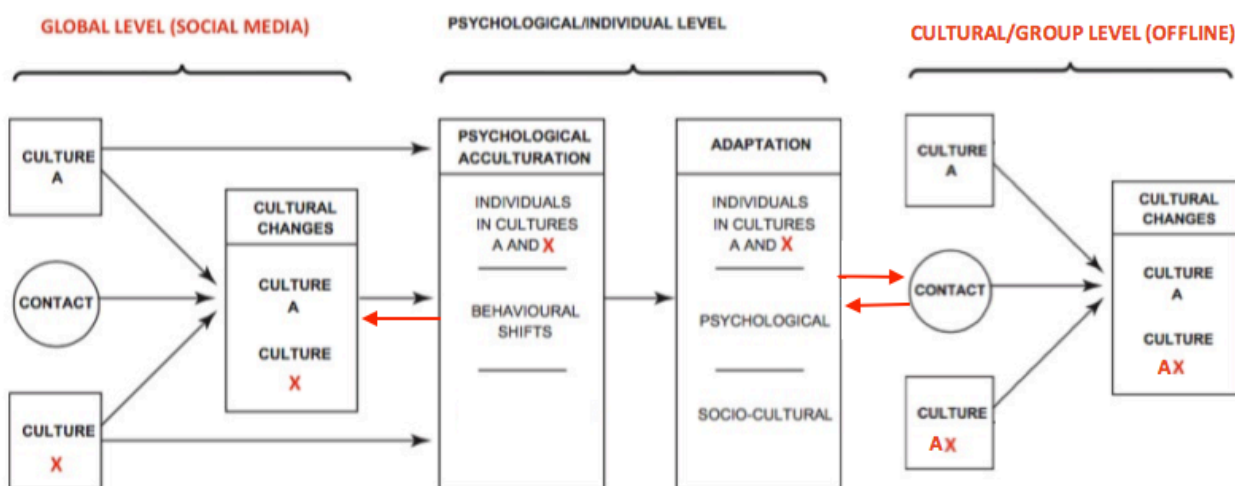
Users are always in contact with their 'original culture' as they do not need to move physically for global acculturation.

For this reason, *global* acculturative stress operates in ways very different from what is currently discussed in relation to acculturation, as individuals have the choice of not taking part in behaviors and values with few to no repercussions.

### A New Addition to the Original Framework

The current theory of acculturation portrays its process as having two levels: cultural/group level and psychological/individual level. From the presented data and the above discussion, we can see that there may, in fact, be three levels of acculturation, when it is global: (1) Global level (i.e. Social Media or the Internet), (2) Individual level, and (3) Group level. This element of social media (and the Internet in general) becomes this first element in the global acculturative process.

Based on the theoretical framework used in this research, I propose the process of global acculturation to be as following:



**Figure 6** – New model depicting process of Global Acculturation

The model depicts a relationship that is different from the current understanding of acculturation as well as the understanding of media in SCT-MC.

First of all, looking into the mechanisms of the process, the dual-link media influence from SCT-MC (cf. chapter 4.2.2.1.) changes in the relation between media influence and social systems: Media influence is no longer a separate mechanism that is spread to the social systems prompting behavioral change. No, the media now becomes the social system in itself (as *Culture X*), and the behavioral change happens *within* the media as opposed to *by* the media. Now that media is no longer just one-way communication, the reaction and interaction on different media changes its structure to be a social system by itself. From it, the users are affected in terms of behavioral change and, only then, do these changes affect the offline social systems.

Additionally, in the global acculturative process, acculturative stress in the individual level has been removed as it was seen to not take up a substantial part of the behaviors online.

Second of all, the model depicts the constant development of Culture AX (online) and Culture A (offline), as the individual will be an active part of both cultures, simultaneously. After the individual continuously goes through the psychological implications of the use of social media (i.e. in the second level of the model), these will affect the offline culture continuously, as well: The more time we spend online, the more Culture A will adapt to Culture X-behavior, reducing the level of Culture A-behaviors in the individual. As a consequence, the implications of Culture AX on Culture A on the group level (i.e. offline) would be higher, which will then lead to Culture A's constant adaptation to Culture X.

In terms of SCT-MC, the ways in which individuals will use their self-reflective capabilities may change, as well, as they might use Culture X as their main reference rather than their original culture; Culture A. The implications of this is that the main culture of the individual might actually change its foundational backing.

Specifically, for the group level of the framework, the theoretical framework states that an understanding of the key features of each of the cultures in question is crucial in understanding the process and its implications. Based on the analysis and the way that social media is used today, this may be different in terms of a global acculturation. As social media encompasses many different cultural backgrounds, distinguishing between each of the features can be difficult, if not impossible. Social media platforms have become a big enough part of individuals' lives all over the world that the overall mainstream culture is the culture portrayed on the platforms themselves (i.e. Culture X

in the proposed framework). This means that the most crucial culture to look into when analyzing and discussing global acculturation is the online culture (Culture X).

Another important notion to mention here is the relation to SCT-MC, which states that people with larger social ties will also usually show higher levels of adoptive behavior (cf. chapter 4.2.2.2.: Social Networks and Flow of Diffusion). With social media today including as many people as it does, the social ties of people (as well as their extended contact with them) is much higher than it would have been in the past where physical meetings were more prominent. Because of this, there should be a difference in the overall global level of adoptive behaviors: I.e. Based on the nature of social media, people should be more prone to behavioral shifts as a whole, making the phenomenon of a global acculturation that more feasible.

Although, when looking into the ways that social media influences individuals as well as groups, it is important to remember that it may not be enough to only look into the differences of the original culture and the host culture, as we have done in the past (i.e. political structures, traditions, and language, etc.). This is because the main structure of them are completely different as a result of the Internet being a type of Universe in itself (e.g. the notion of 'space' between websites etc. is non-existent), which was mentioned earlier in this chapter. – This also affects the implications of the connection to this culture. For this reason, this comparison between the two cultures cannot be fully made: When we look into social media, we need to be aware of algorithms and Internet connection, as well, which are non-existent offline.

Additionally, at the time of this research, there is the global pandemic of Covid-19, which has led to an even higher and more substantial use of the Internet. With this development in social media, we may need to change our entire perspective of culture as a whole, as it changes the structures of interaction, work, school policies, etc.

The question that can arise now, stands on whether or not the implications of a global acculturation is that national cultures will become more and more similar. As the levels of acculturative stress is much lower when the tool for influence is social media, the influence should, as a consequence, also be stronger. Additionally, we saw from the data that the influences of behavioral shifts also affect offline behavior. – This could possibly lead to a globalized society in which the national cultures

become sub-cultures and the main culture is one led by trends and values online. This could change the dynamic between countries as well as humans across the globe positively. Although, from a social perspective, the notion of losing national cultures to a more rigid and same-like structured main culture can have negative implications on the direction of growth, as we can lose the opportunity to learn from and be impressed by different cultures. In a totalitarian sense, it could eliminate acculturation all together.

## **7. Conclusion**

In this study, I have tried to illuminate the implications of the ways that social media platforms, Facebook and Instagram, are used to form a global acculturation as well as the influence it has on socio-cognitive behaviors of the individual. The findings show that there are indeed correlations between the way that we use social media and the prevalence that it has in our everyday lives and the level of cultural and social influence on a global scale.

Through the analysis of my collected survey data, I saw that the highest percentages for main use of Facebook and Instagram was socializing and entertainment, respectively, giving reason to believe that behavioral shifts on both individual and group level (i.e. acculturation) was clearly feasible. On the question of the language use online, the data showed that a substantial part of the respondents used English in their posts. From the interviews, we found that all respondents used English as a common language for their followers and friends.

Through this research, I have found a correlation between (1) the ways in which people interact and behave online and (2) acculturative processes both on- and offline. – We saw that users were susceptible to taking part in behavioral shifts, such as fashion choices or visiting specific places. The analysis shows that the way that we use the social media platforms, Facebook and Instagram, has very clear similarities with the way that ‘classic acculturation’ works in relation to movement between countries. Although, this research shows that there is substantial reason to believe in new channels of acculturation, as well as new levels of (global) reach of acculturative processes, in the

shape of mechanisms and concepts that have previously not taken part in the literature: Based on this research, I propose a new model for global acculturation processes that puts social media platforms as the first element in the process as the Global Level. The Group Level is moved to be the last element (effectively putting the Individual Level in the middle) of the process as the affected individual is in constant connection with both the Global Level (online) and the Group Level (offline).

Looking through the behavioral patterns (i.e. on the individual level) in relation to viral (or online) trends and challenges, we see that there are different ways in which social media users adapt to the culture within it: Not everyone will take part of one aspect (such as online challenges), but will be more susceptible to take part in other trends, which might have a lower level of commitment or risk. Viral trends online should have no immediate negative implications (i.e. acculturative stress) on the users, since different sub-groups online will offer users different levels or variations of the mainstream trends. Although, as we also see that there is an inclination to change offline behaviors, these social and cultural developments online will gradually have an impact on the social and cultural developments in societies offline, as well. As this happens, the global world may become more and more general in its similarities: I.e. we will find that we have more in common, and there will be more understanding across 'national cultures'. Although, with this development offline, we may also see that the different cultures offline may become 'sub-cultures' to the global online culture.

All in all, this research shows that there is substantial reason to believe in a new global acculturative process, in which a third element (i.e. the global level) becomes part of the first dimension showcased in the theoretical framework of Sam and Berry (2010). Significant implications are seen in both language use and other behavioral shifts within the individual as well as the group level, as, for example, the use of English becoming mainstream for users online. The extended use of social media – and the Internet in general – greatly changes the ways that we understand culture, as well as its development. The implications of socio-cognitive behaviors on the individual as well as group level are highly pertinent to the ways that social media is used today, changing the whole dynamic of acculturation on a global level.

## 7.1. Future Research

For future research, it would be relevant to expand the scope of the data collection to a higher number of respondents as well as to include different social media platforms. Additionally, it could be relevant to look into the social media platforms themselves. There can be issues in relation to observing behavior through empirical data sets based on surveys and interviews, as there can be *“gaps between stated and actual behavior”* amongst others (Bryman 2012, 271). By acquiring the rights to use and analyze people’s actual profiles, one would be able to find behavioral patterns that would not be visible from data obtained from the users themselves, as such data can be limited by what respondents believe to be relevant as well as by the researcher’s questions.

Another interesting addition to the research could be the inclusion of other types of media on the Internet, such as Youtube, Netflix, etc. These would be able to show different ways in which interaction and usage of the Internet in general can have an acculturative effect on the individual as well as the group level.

Lastly, a possible perspective that could be highlighted further in future research would be the implications that social media platforms (and other online platforms) have on social lives offline. This could be done by using ethnographic methodologies to obtain data.

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