Article

Unleashing the Potential of Social Media: Enhancing Intercultural Communication Skills in the Hospitality and Tourism Context

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Abstract: Intercultural communication skills play a vital role in achieving success in the global hospitality and tourism profession. This study examined the effectiveness of leveraging social media, specifically YouTube (San Bruno, CA, USA), in developing intercultural competence (ICC) among students enrolled in service management courses within the hospitality and tourism department. The research involved 112 Korean students who were divided into two groups: the experimental group (*n* = 57), which participated in social media-integrated intercultural learning activities; and the control group (*n* = 55), which engaged in traditional intercultural learning activities. Data were collected through pre- and post-questionnaires using the Intercultural Competence Scale (ICS). The findings indicated that social media-based intercultural activities on YouTube were more effective in improving learners' ICC levels compared to traditional classroom activities. Significant differences in mean gain scores underscored the impact of social media-based interventions in promoting intercultural learning and fostering meaningful intercultural engagement. The analysis also revealed noteworthy distinctions between the experimental and control groups across various dimensions of ICC. This study emphasized the value of social media platforms, including YouTube, in facilitating positive changes in affective orientation, self-efficacy, behavior performance, and intercultural consciousness. The research provided practical insights for educators and institutions in the hospitality industry to integrate social media-based intercultural activities, thereby enhancing students' intercultural learning experiences and nurturing their ICC.

Keywords: innovative learning; human resource management; intercultural communication skills; intercultural competence; sustainable development; social media

1. Introduction

The hospitality industry, often known as a "people industry," relies on interpersonal interactions to deliver hotel services [1,2]. In this global context, effective intercultural communication skills play a vital role [3,4]. Service-oriented firms heavily depend on their employees to satisfy customers, providing a competitive advantage to organizations [1,4]. Furthermore, due to the industry's international reach and the growing cross-cultural nature of hospitality services, employees in this field frequently engage with guests from diverse cultural backgrounds, necessitating an understanding of various customs and cultures [5]. Failure to navigate these differences can lead to communication breakdowns and misunderstandings, potentially resulting in negative experiences for guests [6].

Recognizing the significance of this diverse and global industry, many hospitality and tourism management programs prioritize the development of intercultural understanding and intercultural competence (ICC) among their students [7]. Proficiency in intercultural communication is crucial for employees in the increasingly globalized hospitality industry, as well as for tertiary students transitioning into the workforce [8]. Graduates in hospitality and tourism management are likely to interact with customers from diverse cultural

backgrounds, requiring them to accommodate unique requirements and demonstrate adaptability in various work environments. Enhancing ICC skills can significantly contribute to the effective and efficient operation of hotels and the broader tourism industry [7].

Despite the increasing importance of ICC skills in the hospitality industry, studies have shown that hospitality management students often lack sufficient knowledge of cultural differences, leaving them unprepared for the globalized work environment in hospitality [5]. Consequently, it is crucial to develop ICC among students to adequately prepare them for the diverse and global industry. While many hospitality and tourism management programs strive to foster ICC, there is a significant gap in exploring effective interventions that address the development of ICC among students and equip them with the necessary skills to navigate the globalized work environment in hospitality. This highlights the need for innovative approaches to enhance intercultural communication skills within the hospitality and tourism context. In this regard, the utilization of social media platforms presents a promising avenue for enhancing intercultural communication skills among hospitality and tourism students. Social media platforms, such as YouTube, offer unique opportunities for interactive and immersive learning experiences, providing access to diverse cultural content and facilitating intercultural communication. By leveraging the power of social media, educators can create engaging and dynamic learning environments that reflect real-world intercultural interactions, thus bridging the gap between theory and practice.

This study aims to address the research gap in exploring the potential of social media-based intercultural communication and interaction, with a specific focus on YouTube, in cultivating effective ICC among hospitality and tourism students. By examining the impact of social media-based interventions on students' intercultural communication skills, this research seeks to provide valuable insights to educators and industry professionals. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field of hospitality and tourism by advancing our understanding of effective ICC development and offering practical implications for enhancing intercultural communication in educational and professional settings. This, in turn, facilitates the design of interventions that foster ICC among students in the dynamic hospitality and tourism industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework: Sociocultural Theory

In this study, sociocultural theory is drawn as the supporting framework. Sociocultural theory, developed by [8], emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural factors in shaping individual development and learning. This theory posits that learning takes place through social interactions with others, and that individuals construct knowledge and meaning through these interactions within their sociocultural context [8]. Applying sociocultural theory to the current study, the importance of social media platforms in facilitating intercultural communication and enhancing ICC among hospitality and tourism students is recognized. These platforms provide a virtual space where students can engage in meaningful interactions with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, thereby expanding their cultural knowledge, awareness, and communication skills. By incorporating sociocultural theory into the research framework, the aim is to explore the effectiveness of social media, particularly YouTube, in promoting intercultural communication skills among hospitality and tourism students. This theoretical lens allows for an examination of how social interactions and cultural influences within the online environment contribute to the development of ICC. The integration of sociocultural theory in this study seeks to advance understanding of the complex interplay between social media, intercultural communication, and learning outcomes in the hospitality and tourism education context.

2.2. ICC in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry

In the hospitality and tourism industry, ICC plays a vital role in facilitating effective communication and interactions with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds,

thereby avoiding common communication barriers resulting from cultural misunderstandings [9]. Ref. [3] further highlights the significance of "professional ICC" in this context, focusing on the ability to address professional tasks and engage in intercultural communication-related activities. ICC is essential for hospitality and tourism professionals as it enables them to understand cultural differences and provide exceptional service to guests from various backgrounds, creating a welcoming environment that enhances positive guest experiences [3]. Developing ICC is crucial for the effective operation and response to global human capital challenges in hotels and the wider tourism industry [7].

However, research indicates that hospitality and tourism management students often lack sufficient knowledge of cultural differences, leaving them ill-prepared for the globalized hospitality work environment [5]. Consequently, there is a growing recognition of the importance of ICC education, with tertiary institutions increasingly providing students with more comprehensive ICC education tailored for future hospitality and tourism professionals [9]. For instance, ref. [7]'s study explored the intercultural communication challenges and strategies encountered by Thai undergraduate hotel interns during their internships at an in-house hotel training center. The findings highlight the interns' prioritization of intercultural communicative strategies, such as critical cultural awareness, attitudes, knowledge, skills to interpret and relate, and skills to discover and interact. The study underscores the need to equip undergraduate hotel interns with foreign language and cultural proficiency, problem-solving skills, and cross-cultural understanding. It emphasizes the importance of integrating ICC into hospitality programs to adequately prepare graduates for multilingual and multicultural working environments.

Research in the hospitality and tourism industry has delved into various aspects of ICC. For instance, ref. [7] examined the intercultural communication challenges and strategies faced by hotel interns, shedding light on valuable insights for effective communication in the industry. Ref. [10] explored customer responses to intercultural communication accommodation strategies in hospitality services, providing valuable insights into meeting diverse customer needs. Additionally, ref. [11] emphasized the significance of developing a multicultural workforce in the tourism and hospitality sector. Furthermore, ref. [12] conducted a study that focused on the challenges encountered by hospitality and tourism employees when interacting with guests from diverse cultural backgrounds. Their research contributes to the development of effective measures and strategies for overcoming communication barriers, such as using predefined scripts or speech modules. Implementing these recommendations not only enhances staff-guest interactions but also serves as valuable guidance for personnel in other hospitality organizations. By fostering an inclusive and culturally sensitive environment, hospitality professionals can enhance guest satisfaction and overall organizational success. In summary, the literature highlights the critical importance of ICC for hospitality and tourism professionals. It equips them with the necessary skills to understand and navigate potential barriers to effective communication in intercultural contexts.

Currently, there is a research gap in the field of hospitality and tourism regarding the development of ICC among students in university programs, particularly in relation to the utilization of technological tools. Limited studies have addressed this area, including the works of [13,14], which have explored the impact of incorporating technological tools in developing ICC skills. For example, ref. [13] explored the impact of a team-based learning model integrated with various ICT resources in hospitality courses at a Taiwanese university. The goal is to enhance learners' learning enjoyment and intercultural awareness. The findings indicate that knowledge sharing plays a significant role in connecting perceived enjoyment, team effectiveness, and perceived individual learning in the blended team-based learning model. Furthermore, the study highlights the promotion of intercultural awareness, which is attributed to the learners' willingness to collaborate with peers from diverse learning backgrounds. Similarly, ref. [14] explored the effects of technology-enhanced interventions in hospitality curricula on students' intercultural competencies and internship preparation. Their findings demonstrated that incorporating multimedia

inputs, web-based learning opportunities, and interactive communications significantly enhanced students' intercultural competencies, knowledge retention, and intercultural awareness. Students' learning interactions improve through video-making, sharing, and classroom discussions, leading to increased intercultural awareness. Regarding internship preparation, students express moderate levels of satisfaction with the course's effectiveness. The study contributes theoretical and practical insights into integrating ICT within hospitality courses.

There is a pressing need for more studies to incorporate courses that utilize technological tools to develop ICC among hospitality students during their university years, in preparation for their future professions. While certain studies, such as those conducted by [13,14], have examined the impact of technology-enhanced interventions in hospitality curricula, there remains a research gap in evaluating the effectiveness of incorporating technological tools specifically within university programs for ICC development, including within the specific context of Korea. Conducting studies tailored to the Korean university context would yield valuable insights into the implementation and outcomes of such courses, facilitating the identification of best practices to enhance students' ICC competencies and contribute to their future success in the hospitality and tourism industry.

2.3. Leveraging Social Media for ICC Development

Over the past decade, the influence of social media on ICC has been a burgeoning field of study. The ability of social media to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries has made it a powerful tool for fostering ICC. Researchers have noted its ability to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries, contributing to a better understanding of different cultures and fostering global connections [15,16]. Social media platforms facilitate the sharing of cultural content, creating opportunities for cultural exchanges and promoting cultural understanding [17]. They serve as virtual melting pots, enabling diverse cultural groups to interact and learn from one another [18]. By utilizing social media platforms, language learners have the opportunity to actively participate in authentic intercultural communication, thereby honing their language skills and increasing their cultural awareness and understanding, and ultimately contributing to the development of ICC.

Most of the research on utilizing social media platforms for ICC has been conducted within the context of language learning. Various social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, WeChat, and others, provide language learners with opportunities to actively participate in social and intercultural interactions with individuals from different cultures [15,16,18,19]. These interactions have demonstrated positive outcomes in ICC development among language learners [15,16,18,19]. For instance, a five-year project involving Chinese and American university students using WeChat as the main platform showed positive changes in various ICC variables, such as knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and skills for effective social interactions within the target culture, as well as resolving cross-cultural conflicts and misunderstandings [16]. Another study, ref. [15], explored a semester-long telecollaborative exchange using WeChat, resulting in the development of four types of ICC based on ref. [20]'s model of ICC among Chinese and American students. These types included interest in understanding others' ways of life and introducing their own culture, knowledge about their own and others' cultures for intercultural communication, the ability to change perspectives, and understanding of the intercultural communication process. Twitter has also been found to be effective in fostering ICC among pre-service teachers, particularly in terms of knowledge and attitudes [19]. Additionally, Facebook have been utilized to enhance ICC among Korean EFL learners [18] and Japanese ESL learners [21].

However, limited research has been conducted within the hospitality and tourism context regarding the use of social media to develop ICC among learners. For instance, ref. [14] explored the effects of blended learning, specifically web-based learning opportunities through Facebook, in enhancing students' ICC and interaction in hospitality curricula. The study revealed that multifaceted classroom activities, including video-making, sharing, and

discussions on Facebook, significantly promoted students' ICC, improved their learning interactions, and heightened their intercultural awareness. This research offers both theoretical and practical insights into integrating social media platforms such as Facebook into hospitality courses, enriching students' learning experiences and fostering intercultural understanding. Furthermore, ref. [22] examined students' ICC levels and the impact of using new media, particularly social networking sites, for intercultural communication activities. The study identified new media usage, particularly social networking sites, as a predictor of ICC levels, although its impact on increasing ICC was relatively small. The research emphasized the positive influence of social networking sites in boosting students' confidence to engage with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. The study concluded that students should be encouraged and trained to effectively utilize new media, especially social networking sites, for communication and interaction with individuals from other cultures.

To fill the research gap and meet the increasing demand for intercultural communication skills in our fast-paced globalized world, it is crucial to conduct more empirical studies that focus on the use of social media platforms to enhance students' ICC, particularly within the hospitality and tourism context. With this goal in mind, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of YouTube, a widely used video-publishing and sharing platform, as an interactive social media tool for promoting ICC. Incorporating YouTube into classroom instruction for intercultural interaction offers numerous advantages. It serves as a vibrant hub where individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds gather and engage in various discussions. Students can actively participate in conversations based on their interests, contributing to a rich exchange of ideas. Surprisingly, there is a lack of information on utilizing YouTube specifically for ICC development, especially within the hospitality and tourism field. By investigating the potential of YouTube as a tool for ICC enhancement, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how social media can positively impact intercultural communication skills in the hospitality and tourism education domain. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research question:

Q: To what extent can the use of social media, specifically YouTube, effectively enhance ICC among hospitality and tourism students?

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

This study was conducted in required hospitality courses in a university in south Korea. This course aims to assist students in cultivating ICC that are applicable to their future professions and enhance their communication abilities and confidence in various settings, including academic, professional, and social contexts. The study consisted of two groups, namely, the experimental group (n = 57, 24 males and 33 females) and the control group (n = 55, 26 males and 29 females). All participants were Korean sophomores, aged between 20 and 21, with Korean as their native language. They were all hospitality major students. The classes were conducted twice a week, each session lasting 90 min, throughout the 16-week semester. The researcher provided identical instructions to both groups, but 50% of the course involved intercultural learning activities. The experimental group engaged in social-media based intercultural learning activities through YouTube, while the control group participated in traditional intercultural learning activities. These activities were conducted once a week during the 90-min sessions for both groups.

3.2. Research Procedures

Prior to commencing the experiment, the participants were duly informed about their involvement in a research study and requested to provide informed consent. They received an overview of the objectives and procedures of the experiment. To ensure utmost confidentiality, the participants were assured that their identity, performance, and all data collected during the study would remain strictly confidential and solely used for research purposes. With a clear understanding of these conditions, all participants willingly agreed

to take part in the experiment. At the beginning of the course, in the first week, both the experimental and control groups were administered a pre-questionnaire to assess their ICC.

The experimental group participated in intercultural learning activities within the computer laboratory, utilizing YouTube as a social media platform. Prior to the activity, participants received detailed instructions on selecting YouTube videos that aligned with their personal interests while also containing cultural content. They were encouraged to carefully choose videos that facilitated intercultural interaction, fostering meaningful discussions and exchanges among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds worldwide. Subsequently, participants watched the selected videos and were prompted to leave comments, initiating and engaging in further interaction. The selection of video content emphasized promoting intercultural engagement, thus enabling rich intercultural interactions on YouTube. The main objective of the experimental group's activities was to provide participants with the opportunity to engage with a broad range of culturally diverse content, facilitating immersive and enriching intercultural learning experiences, as well as to interact with individuals from various cultural backgrounds around the world.

On the other hand, the control group engaged in traditional intercultural learning activities conducted in a classroom setting. During these sessions, participants engaged in face-to-face discussions and group activities that focused on exploring and understanding different cultural perspectives. The instructor introduced topics related to cultural diversity, intercultural communication, and cultural awareness. Participants were encouraged to share their own experiences, ask questions, and participate in group discussions to deepen their understanding of different cultures and foster the development of intercultural sensitivity. The control group's activities aimed to enhance ICC through traditional classroom-based learning methods, fostering understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures and their practices. At the end of the experiment, both groups completed a post-questionnaire on ICC to assess the outcomes of their respective learning experiences.

3.3. Instrument: Intercultural Competence Scale (ICS)

The study utilized the intercultural competence scale (ICS) developed by [23]. The ICS has been utilized to assess individuals' levels of ICC, demonstrating reliability and validity specifically within the Asian context [24,25]. Moreover, within the field of hospitality education, the ICS has been employed to evaluate ICC among students enrolled in hospitality courses at universities [13,14]. In line with this, the present study adopted the ICS to assess the ICC of students taking hospitality courses in Korea, providing insights within the Asian context (see Appendix A). The ICS comprises 30 items categorized into five dimensions: knowledge of intercultural interaction ($n = 9$, $\alpha = 0.86$), affective orientation to intercultural interaction ($n = 6$, $\alpha = 0.81$), self-efficacy in intercultural situations ($n = 3$, $\alpha = 0.85$), behavioral performance in intercultural interaction ($n = 7$, $\alpha = 0.83$), and display of intercultural consciousness ($n = 5$, $\alpha = 0.79$). Participants rated each statement using a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). The internal consistency of each dimension was assessed through reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. In this study, the alpha coefficients were found to be acceptable, suggesting good internal consistency within each dimension of the questionnaire.

3.4. Data Analysis

To analyze the data in this study, pre- and post- questionnaires were used to measure the ICC levels of the participants for both experimental and control group. The SPSS 24 statistics program was employed for data analysis. Paired-sample *t*-tests and independent-sample *t*-tests were conducted on the pre- and post-questionnaires for both groups to determine if there was significant improvement in ICC levels. Additionally, independent-sample *t*-tests were conducted to compare the mean gain scores of ICC of the two groups, specifically in five dimensions of ICC.

4. Results

4.1. Effectiveness of Social-Media Based Intercultural Activities on ICC Levels

The pre-questionnaires assessing ICC were compared between the experimental and control groups using an independent *t*-test prior to commencing the study. The results revealed no significant difference in mean scores between the experimental group (*M* = 76.46, *SD* = 5.54) and the control group (*M* = 76.05, *SD* = 4.45) (*t*(110) = 0.42, *p* = 0.674), indicating that the two groups were comparable.

To assess the level of ICC within each group and the changes observed throughout the study, paired-sample *t*-tests were conducted for pre- and post-test results. Analyzing Table 1, the experimental group exhibited a significant increase in mean post-test scores (*M* = 97.14, *SD* = 7.18) compared to the pre-test (*M* = 76.46, *SD* = 5.54), with a substantial difference of 20.68. This difference was statistically significant according to the paired sample *t*-test (*t*(56) = −34.22, *p* < 0.001). Similarly, the control group exhibited a slight increase in mean post-test scores (*M* = 85.16, *SD* = 8.96) compared to the pre-test (*M* = 76.05, *SD* = 4.45), with a mean difference of 9.11. This difference was also statistically significant (*t*(54) = −8.53, *p* < 0.001). These findings indicate that both interventions, intercultural activities utilizing social media on YouTube and traditional intercultural activities, effectively enhanced participants' ICC levels.

Table 1. Pre- and post-questionnaire results on ICC for both groups.

Group		*N*	*M*	*SD*	*df*	*t*	*p*
Experimental	Pre	57	76.46	5.54	56	−34.22 ***	0.000
	Post	57	97.14	7.18			
Control	Pre	55	76.05	4.45	54	−8.53 ***	0.000
	Post	55	85.16	8.96			

*** *p* < 0.001.

Building upon the observed positive effects in both groups, this study aimed to explore potential differences in mean gain scores between the two interventions, assessing their relative effectiveness in enhancing students' ICC levels. An independent *t*-test was conducted to examine disparities in mean gain, and the results are presented in Table 2. As depicted in Table 2, the experimental group exhibited a mean difference of 20.68, surpassing the mean difference of 9.11 observed in the control group. These results indicate significant differences (*t*(110) = 9.52, *p* < 0.001) between the two groups. The study's findings indicate that the social media-based intercultural activity using YouTube was significantly more effective in enhancing learners' ICC levels compared to the traditional classroom-based intercultural activity. This supports the notion that utilizing social media platforms for interactive intercultural communication is a superior approach for enhancing ICC levels among students. The observed significant differences in mean gain scores between the experimental and control groups underscore the effectiveness of leveraging social media for intercultural engagement.

Table 2. Mean gain differences in ICC levels: experimental vs. control groups.

Group	*N*	Mean Gain Difference	*SD*	*df*	*t*	*p*
Experimental	57	20.68	4.56	110	9.52 ***	0.000
Control	55	9.11	7.92			

*** *p* < 0.001.

4.2. Comparative Analysis of ICC Levels: Experimental vs. Control Group across Five Dimensions

To conduct a thorough investigation, this study explored the potential differences in the progress of each dimension of ICC between the experimental and control groups.

The results of the independent *t*-test on the mean gain scores for each dimension of ICC development within both groups are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparative analysis of ICC levels: differences in five dimensions between groups.

Dimension	Group	N	Mean Gain Difference	SD	df	t	p
Knowledge	Experimental	57	6.04	2.57	110	0.50	0.616
	Control	55	5.58	6.28			
Affective	Experimental	57	6.28	2.45	110	12.68 ***	0.000
	Control	55	1.20	1.70			
Self-efficacy	Experimental	57	2.14	1.16	110	10.50 ***	0.000
	Control	55	0.09	0.89			
Behavior performance	Experimental	57	4.47	2.24	110	7.86 ***	0.000
	Control	55	1.45	1.78			
Intercultural consciousness	Experimental	57	1.75	1.42	110	3.41 **	0.001
	Control	55	0.78	1.60			

** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

The comparative analysis presented in Table 3 revealed notable distinctions between the two groups across several dimensions. Affective orientation ($t(110) = 12.68$, $p < 0.001$), self-efficacy ($t(110) = 10.50$, $p < 0.001$), behavior performance ($t(110) = 7.86$, $p < 0.001$), and intercultural consciousness ($t(110) = 3.41$, $p < 0.01$) demonstrated statistically significant differences. These findings indicate that the social media-based intercultural activities using YouTube were effective in promoting positive changes in these dimensions among the participants. On the other hand, no significant disparities were observed between the two groups in the dimension of knowledge ($t(110) = 0.50$, $p = 0.616$). This suggests that both interventions, the social media-based activities, and the traditional classroom activities, were equally effective in enhancing participants' knowledge of intercultural interaction. Overall, these findings provide strong evidence supporting the effectiveness of social media-based intercultural activities utilizing YouTube in facilitating positive changes in affective orientation, self-efficacy, behavior performance, and intercultural consciousness. This underscores the potential of such interventions to enhance participants' ICC and contribute to their overall intercultural learning experience.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of social-media based intercultural learning activities using YouTube on hospitality students' ICC development. The results of the study indicate the social media-based intercultural activities using YouTube were more effective in enhancing learners' ICC levels compared to the traditional classroom activities. This finding supported the notion that leveraging social media platforms for interactive intercultural communication provides a valuable approach to enhancing ICC levels among students. The significant differences in mean gain scores highlight the impact of social media-based interventions on promoting intercultural learning and the potential of such interventions to foster meaningful intercultural engagement. This is in line with previous studies [14,22], which demonstrated the positive outcome of using social media in hospitality courses for hospitality students' development of ICC, enriching students' intercultural learning experiences and fostering ICC successfully. Furthermore, these findings align with research conducted in the context of language learning [15,16,18,19], which also emphasized the positive impact of using social media for ICC development. These studies provide additional support for the effectiveness of social media-based interventions in fostering ICC among learners. By incorporating social media platforms into hospitality courses, students are provided with opportunities to actively engage in intercultural interactions, broaden their cultural knowledge, and develop their ICC. The integration of

social media not only enhances the effectiveness of intercultural learning but also enriches students' overall intercultural experiences.

Additionally, the analysis of ICC levels across five dimensions showed notable distinctions between the experimental and control groups. Significant differences were observed in affective orientation, self-efficacy, behavior performance, and intercultural consciousness dimensions, indicating the effectiveness of the social media-based intercultural activities in promoting positive changes in these dimensions. These findings suggest that the social media-based intercultural activities using the YouTube platform provided a more immersive, engaging, and interactive learning experience for students, which likely contributed to more effective and efficient intercultural learning outcomes. There are several possible reasons for the observed differences. Firstly, the social media-based activities on YouTube might have facilitated greater exposure to diverse cultural content and perspectives. The interactive nature of the platform, which allows for real-time comments, discussions, and engagement with a global audience, could have fostered a deeper understanding and appreciation of different cultures. Moreover, the multimedia elements of YouTube, such as videos and visual materials, might have enhanced students' ability to grasp and internalize intercultural concepts. Lastly, the social nature of social media platforms allows for increased opportunities for interaction and communication with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Engaging with a global community through comments, discussions, and collaborations may have fostered intercultural communication skills and intergroup interactions, further enhancing participants' ICC. In contrast, traditional classroom settings may not offer the same opportunities for real-world encounters with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Overall, the findings suggest that the social media-based intercultural activities on YouTube offer unique advantages in promoting positive changes in affective orientation, self-efficacy, behavior performance, and intercultural consciousness. These advantages stem from the immersive and interactive nature of the platform, the exposure to diverse cultural content, and the flexibility and social connectivity it provides. These factors likely contributed to the observed differences in ICC levels between the experimental and control groups, highlighting the potential of social media platforms as effective tools for intercultural learning and competence development.

However, no significant disparities were found in the knowledge dimension, suggesting that both interventions were equally effective in enhancing participants' knowledge of intercultural interaction. The results suggest that the traditional classroom activities, with their face-to-face discussions and group activities, were as effective as the social media-based activities in delivering the necessary knowledge for ICC.

Overall, the findings of this study provide strong evidence supporting the effectiveness of social media-based intercultural activities utilizing YouTube in facilitating positive changes in ICC development among hospitality students. These interventions not only enhance students' intercultural learning experiences but also contribute to the development of their ICC, which is crucial in the globalized hospitality industry. The unique advantages offered by social media platforms, such as the immersive and interactive learning environment, exposure to diverse cultural content, and increased opportunities for intercultural communication, make them valuable tools for promoting positive changes in ICC.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study highlights the significance of integrating social media-based intercultural activities into hospitality education to enhance students' intercultural learning experiences and foster their ICC. By embracing these innovative pedagogical approaches, educators and institutions can better prepare students to navigate and succeed in diverse cultural settings, contributing to their personal growth and professional success in the hospitality industry.

The implications of this study hold significant value for the field of hospitality education. By integrating social media-based intercultural activities into the curriculum, educators can create engaging and dynamic learning opportunities that authentically re-

flect real-world intercultural interactions. These activities foster the development of ICC and effective intercultural communication skills, which are highly sought-after in the globalized hospitality industry. From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to the advancement of sociocultural theory by showcasing the transformative power of social media platforms in facilitating intercultural learning. Sociocultural theory emphasizes the pivotal role of social interactions and cultural context in shaping individuals' learning experiences. By leveraging social media, educators can create immersive and interactive environments where students engage with diverse cultural perspectives, thereby promoting cultural understanding and enhancing their intercultural communication skills. This aligns with the core principles of sociocultural theory, as it highlights the importance of social interaction and cultural immersion in the educational process. Practically, this study provides actionable insights for educators in the field of hospitality education. By incorporating social media-based intercultural activities, educators can bridge the gap between theory and practice, preparing students for the realities of the globalized hospitality industry. These activities offer students the opportunity to navigate real-world intercultural scenarios, fostering their cultural competence and enhancing their ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries. Furthermore, the integration of social media platforms facilitates the use of multimedia resources, enabling students to engage with diverse cultural content and develop a nuanced understanding of different cultures. This practical application of sociocultural theory principles equips students with the skills and competencies needed to thrive in today's multicultural hospitality environment. Overall, this study's implications, grounded in sociocultural theory, highlight the theoretical significance and practical relevance of incorporating social media-based intercultural activities in hospitality education. By embracing these implications, educators can empower students with the necessary tools to navigate cultural diversity, enhance intercultural communication, and contribute to the success of the globalized hospitality industry.

While this study has provided valuable insights and significant findings, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that should be taken into consideration. Firstly, the relatively small sample size in this study may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Caution should be exercised when applying the results to other contexts, as the sample may not fully represent the diversity within the population of hospitality students. Conducting future research with larger and more diverse samples would enhance the external validity of the findings and allow for more robust conclusions to be drawn. Secondly, it is worth noting that this study primarily relied on quantitative measures and did not incorporate qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews or focus groups. These qualitative approaches could have provided a deeper understanding of students' perspectives, experiences, and opinions related to intercultural learning within the context of social media-based activities. Future studies could consider integrating qualitative methodologies to gain a more nuanced understanding of students' perceptions and insights, thereby enriching the overall understanding of the effectiveness and impact of social media-based intercultural activities.

Building upon the findings of this study, several avenues for future research are recommended. Firstly, investigating the long-term effects of social media-based intercultural activities on students' ICC and their application in real-world intercultural contexts would provide valuable insights. This longitudinal perspective would offer a deeper understanding of the sustainability and lasting impact of these interventions. Additionally, exploring the potential of incorporating other emerging technologies, such as virtual reality or augmented reality, in intercultural learning could open up new avenues for research and innovation in this field. Examining the effectiveness of these immersive technologies in fostering ICC and enhancing intercultural communication skills would contribute to advancing the field of hospitality education. Furthermore, conducting comparative studies between different social media platforms or exploring the influence of different types of social media content on intercultural communication skills could provide further insights into the optimal use of social media in intercultural education. By addressing these limi-

tations and exploring the suggested areas of follow-up research, future studies can build upon the foundation laid by this research and further contribute to the understanding and enhancement of intercultural communication skills in the field of hospitality education.

Appendix A

Intercultural Competence Scale (ICS) [22]

6 = strongly agree; 5 = agree; 4 = slightly agree; 3 = slightly disagree; 2 = disagree; 1 = strongly disagree

Factor 1: Knowledge of intercultural interaction

1. I know the routine aspects of life in other cultures (e.g., cuisine and customs).
2. I know the rules of non-verbal behaviors in other cultures.
3. I know the visible achievement cultures, related to the facts and knowledge of world civilizations (e.g., arts, literature).
4. I know the rules of verbal behaviors in other cultures.
5. I know the signs of cultural stress and strategies for overcoming culture shock.
6. I know how to use the culture-value approach to understand the attitudes and behaviors of people from different cultures.
7. I know how historical and socio-political factors influence the attitudes and behavior of people from different cultures.
8. I know how to appropriately negotiate with people from different cultures in intercultural contexts.
9. I know the interactive behaviors common among people of different cultures in professional areas.

Factor 2: Affective orientation to intercultural interaction

10. I enjoy communicating with people from different cultures.
11. I am willing to acquire knowledge regarding different world cultures.
12. I am willing to manage emotions and frustrations when interacting with people from different cultures.
13. I am willing to demonstrate my interest in understanding people of other cultures that are unfamiliar to me.
14. I am willing to modify my attitude and behavior to interact appropriately with people of other cultures.
15. I am willing to communicate with people of other cultures to broaden my worldview.

Factor 3: Self-efficacy in intercultural situations

16. I am confident that I can interact with people of other cultures appropriately and effectively.
17. I am confident that I can adjust to living in different cultural contexts.
18. I am confident that I can adjust to the stress of culture shock.

Factor 4: Behavioral performance in intercultural interaction

19. I can effectively use English to communicate with other people of different cultural backgrounds.
20. I can eat what others eat in culturally diverse situations.
21. I can use functional languages (e.g., invitation, refusal, and apology) flexibly for achieving appropriate intercultural communication.
22. I can develop appropriate interactive strategies (e.g., directness and face-saving) to adjust to the diverse styles of intercultural communication.
23. I can modify the way I dress when it is necessary in intercultural situations.
24. I can change my verbal behavior (e.g., speed, accent) when it is necessary in intercultural situations.
25. I can change my non-verbal behavior (e.g., gestures, facial expressions) when it is necessary in intercultural situations.

Factor 5: Display of intercultural consciousness

26. I do not generalize a person's behaviors as being representative of a particular culture.
27. I am well prepared before any intercultural contact.
28. I can realize the cultural knowledge I apply to intercultural interaction.
29. I can sense how my cultural background influences my attitudes and approaches to managing emerging problems during intercultural communication.
30. I can sense that the responses other people provide during intercultural communication often reflect their own values and beliefs.

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