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Edited by
Prof. Wybe Popma and Stuart Francis

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Influence of Social Media on Migration and Integration process

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Abstract: The objective of the research was to summarize available studies regarding refugee's/ immigrant's social and economic integration and assess the influence of SM/ICT in the Migration and Integration process by using a systematic literature review approach. 18 relevant studies out of 53 studies were obtained from 3 databases and were systematically included in the review. The research question was divided into four sub-questions regarding the type of media, information access, government role and how social media facilitates migration and integration. It was found that social media plays a big role in their migration and resettlement process. The use of ICT and SM depends on the availability of the service and the exposure of the participants. SM/ ICT helps migrants to maintain stronger ties with their family and friends in their origin countries and allow them to communicate effectively by eliminating social and structural barriers. It facilitates integrating into a new society by providing information about culture, norms/values, and the economy. It is also identified that social media might inspire potential refugees by providing essential information regarding refugee influx policies, different information regarding borders and smugglers. But even if ICT/ SM plays a big role in the process of migration and resettlement among refugees/immigrants, usage of the technology doesn't guarantee their social inclusion. The results were found as expected but also new further directions were identified regarding whether social media could enable social inclusion and integration. Finally, the study identifies research topics for ongoing researches.

Keywords: refugees, immigrants, migration, information communication technology (ICT), social media (SM), integration

1. Introduction and motivation

Migration is often caused by a search for a better life, better education and sometimes happens involuntarily. According to Germany’s Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge BAMF), there are approximately 4.6 million asylum seekers/ immigrants that came to Germany since 1953. The statistics of the year 2015 shows that there are 476,649 asylum applications from immigrants who were registered in Germany. This is the highest amount compared to the previous year and showed an increase of 135%. (BAMF, 2016). According to this migration report, 35.9% of the total asylum applicants were from Syria (“Migration Report 2015 Central conclusions Migration Report 2015,” 2015).

While generally refugees/immigrants are considered to have a negative effect on the society and economy of the host country, the long-term benefit for such countries is undeniable. In most developed countries where the median ages are continuously shifting to higher ages, the refugees should be considered as an integral part of the society with a long-term investment revenue (Christensen, Dobihammer, Rau, & Vaupel, 2009). According to current refugee statistics, most of them are between 14 and 34 years old, which means that the country can benefit from their labour force if the refugees are well integrated. (BAMF, 2016).

Social media is a useful tool to address and influence a great number of people in a short amount of time. Its accessibility and influence of reaching a group of people rapidly make online social media and Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) to be chosen as a communication tool between different parts of the society. Currently, there are several social media services that help refugees with the migration and the integration process. The objective of this paper is to explore how social media/ ICT influences the process of refugee integration. We use a Systematic Literature Review approach to investigate available research that is relevant to the research objective.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Migration and Integration process

Berry (2003) defined acculturation as: “a process of cultural and psychological change occurring when two or more different cultures are in contact, with the former displaying alterations in a group level (e.g. national characteristics and customs) and the latter at the individual level (e.g. behaviour and cultural identities).” Immigrants and refugees face this when relocating to a new country and merge in a new culture and society (Tudsri & Hebbani, 2015).
According to Warschauer (2003, p. 8), people are assumed to be integrated into society when they participate fully and feel that they belong to their new living environment. Employment, housing, education and health are considered to be the most important factors that determine the act of integration and resettlement – both for the host country as well as refugees. Ager and Strang (2008) stress the importance of taking good consideration of these factors into account in order to improve the integration process and encourage programs related to these factors. To improve the integration of immigrants, it is therefore required that host country governments should arrange training or development programs dedicated to the integration factors mentioned above as they will also be beneficial for the country (Ager & Strang 2008)

2.2 Information communication (ICT) and technology and social media (SM)

In today’s world, Social Media and ICT applications can make significant improvements on human’s day to day life. The use of these applications can increase the accessibility of knowledge and the amount of available information. Politicians, big corporations and governments are also taking advantage of these digital technologies to reach their citizen, the general public and immigrants. Currently, there are a number of online social networks that are widely used, but Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are some of the most popular and frequently used (Zhang, n.d.).

According to Mc Gregor & Siegel (2013), social media includes “websites (blogs), collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn), content communities (e.g. YouTube), virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life), as well as virtual gaming worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft)” (Lăsăticoa, 2014).

The use of social media has improved due to a recent increase in the number of refugees. They use social media as a medium of communication to escape the disaster area and to reach to economically stable countries. According to Wilding (2009), Social Media and ICT facilitate information flows and information can be accessed across borders. They are not limited to physical reach and can also be distributed on a larger scale on a relatively economical investment (Andrade & Doolin, 2016); (Dekker, Engbersen, & Faber, 2016).

3. Research methodology

A Systematic Literature Review was chosen as the methodological approach of our research. The overriding research question is to what extent social media influences the migration and integration process. Then it is divided into four sub-questions (SQ) to further describe and evaluate it. The sub-questions are:

- SQ1. Which type of Social Media/ICTs are frequently used among Refugees?
- SQ2. Where do refugees get their information? Do they also visit governmental ICTs/ social media pages and sites?
- SQ3. How do social media / ICT facilitate refugee migration and integration?
- SQ4. What kind of internet information services does the government provide to support refugee integration?

After formulating the research question, three databases (Springer, Wiley Online Library and Web of Science) were evaluated and observed to identify related studies to be included in this systematic literature review. Google Scholar was also used as a search engine to identify published works for the literature review.

Our preliminary screening is followed by the process of data extraction and synthesis. Search keywords were derived from the research question and were applied to minimize possible biases. Fifty-three relevant studies to the research topic were selected from the three databases and following preliminary and full-text screening criterion 18 studies were selected to be included in the review. The following chart (Figure 1) summarises the process of the search strategy used by this literature review.

3.1 Preliminary screening

The following inclusion and exclusion criterion were applied to screen the studies that are relevant to the research question. A table was made to document the process of the criteria for 53 articles.
3.1.1 Inclusion criteria

Journal articles, chapter of a book, conference papers and unpublished report written in English language or translated studies relevant to the research question were included. Research papers that are published between the year 2000 and 2017 were chosen to be included in the review because it was relevant for the research direction, but earlier studies regarding migration and integration are included in the introduction and theoretical background. All studies with all genders are included and we didn’t apply any age restrictions.

<table>
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<th>Records Identified through database screening (n=53)</th>
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<td>Records after duplicates removed (n=51)</td>
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<td>Full-Text articles excluded with reasons (n=6)</td>
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<td>Student master’s thesis excluded (n=2)</td>
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<td>Studies included in the review (n=18)</td>
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*Figure 1*: Relevant studies documentation chart

3.1.2 Exclusion criteria

Articles that doesn’t include refugees/ immigrants and only focuses on information technology and that emphasis their integration using traditional media are excluded. Religious articles that mention only a certain type of religion followers integrate in host countries and ICTs used for immigrant activism were not associated to the review. And information technology that is used for political elections, government and public services are not included in this literature review.

3.2 Full-text screening

After preliminary screening, six articles were excluded because some articles were too short and not relevant with the main research direction. Follow-up studies by the same author was inspected and the latest version is included in the review. And finally student’s master thesis was excluded.

4. Results and findings

Upon arrival, refugees face difficulties in finding the right information regarding resettlement process; they may feel isolated because of differences in culture and face communication difficulties (Nadia Caidi, Allard, & Quirke, 2008). ICTs and social media can ease up with “post-migration stressors”. (Mikal & Woodfield, 2015).
It is known that anyone who mixes in a new society initially experiences inferiority than the local community, this was especially spotted in young refugee’s initial experience and their sense of insecurity because of various former limited economic and technological experiences (Elias & Lemish, 2009). In some cases, refugees are socially and residentially segregated, this might affect their social interaction and access to technology-related services (Mesch, 2012). Their media usage also depended on age, affordance, social and educational status (D’Haenens & Peeters, 2005).

- **SQ1. Which type of Social Media/ICTs are frequently used among Refugees?**

It was found that different kinds of ICTs and SMs were used in refugee integration and migration processes but the usage largely depends on the country of residence. Skype, Social networking sites, Google+, YouTube, Viber, WhatsApp and other chatting applications were among the most frequently used to communicate with family, friends, fellow refugees and other members of the host society (Lášticová, 2014); (Mesch, 2012); (Khoir, Du, & Koronios, 2015); (Elias & Lemish, 2009); (Ahmed & Veronis, 2016); (D’Haenens & Peeters, 2005); (Nadia Caidi et al., 2008).

It was also discovered that non-migrants also use ICTs/SMs to get information about potential host countries. Skype, chatting applications, email, Social networking sites, different websites or blogs were used to get information from migrated friends and families (Dekker et al., 2016).

In line with the increase in refugees in recent years, numerous apps that target these community are developed to facilitate the integration process. They provide information about safe and easier journey routes, give information about their new living place, help them reconnect with their loved ones and provide economic and social support. Some of the apps are REFUGERMANY, INFOAID, GIVENOW, REFUNITE, ANKOMMEN, REFUCHAT, REFUGEE PHRASEBOOK, SPEAKFREE AND REFOOFDGE.

- **SQ2. Where do refugees get their information? Do they also visit governmental ICTs/social media pages and sites?**

Refugees/immigrants are vulnerable and they don’t usually know where to look for information regarding the host country’s integration and resettlement information.

Even if it was stated in SQ1 that they use different ICTs/SMs to explore and get vital resettlement information, it was also found that most of them initially (usually) go to family and friends that are already settled in host countries. One study showed that immigrants in the UK use a website from settled fellow immigrants for integration information (Elias & Lemish, 2009).

There was only one study that showed their usage of governmental websites to access integration information regarding local school for children and has email contacts within government organizations regarding housing (Siddiquee & Kagan, 2006).

- **SQ3. How do social media/ICT facilitate refugee migration and integration?**

ICTs and SMs help individuals to express their opinions, to engage in social dialogue and to build their own social connections by linking refugees/immigrants to the broader world, it plays a big role in their empowerment. It reduces the physical distance by facilitating information flow around the world and allows them to communicate well with their family and friends in their country of origin (Andrade & Doolin, 2016).

It also facilitates integrating to a new society by providing information about culture, norms/values and information regarding resettlement issues about the host country. And SM/ICT also allows them to communicate effectively by eliminating communication barriers and help them to be involved fully in their new living place. It helps them to deal with post-migration stress and reduce the feeling of isolation from the new society by providing relevant information and by creating a bridge to communicate and increase their involvement in local community (for example; getting a training programs that matches with the local standard for employment opportunities) (Siddiquee & Kagan, 2006); (Elias & Lemish, 2009); (Elias & Lemish, 2009).

It was also discovered that ICTs/SMs might facilitate migration. According to Dekker & Engbersen (2014), the internet might inspire and “stimulate migration aspirations”. Availability of abundant inexpensive information might lower aspiring refugee’s effort to gain access to migration information regarding refugee influx policies.
different information about borders and smugglers. It also creates an influence by displaying the lives of settled refugees/immigrants portrayed by on these technologies (Dekker et al., 2016).

There is, of course, some limitations to using ICTs/SMs because refugees/immigrants might get unfiltered information regarding migration or resettlement and can be a victim of different exploitation. It can also be risky because it leaves digital traces which can endanger vulnerable refugees because human traffickers can use this opportunity to track and blackmail their loved ones for money. (Gillespie et al., 2016); (Phillips, Hassan, & Twigt, 2016); (Mikal & Woodfield, 2015); (Dekker & Engbersen, 2013).

- SQ4. What kind of internet information services does the government provide to support refugee integration?

   It was discovered that some governments closely work with data providers to deliver free and first-class information to the public (Beyan, Handschuh, Siegfried Koupis, Fragidis, & Decker, 2016). For example; Germany’s Federal Office for Migration and Refugees has a dedicated page in its official website for refugees. And also a study made in New Zealand displayed that the government provides different ICT services to integrate refugees/immigrants to society (Andrade & Doolin, 2016).

   But also most non-governmental organizations working with refugees (NGOs) and human rights organizations supports refugees/immigrants by providing online information and organizing different fundraising activities (Druke, 2002).

   Apart from using information technologies to access this information, face-to-face communication also plays an important role (Siddiquee & Kagan, 2006); (Lamba & Krahn, 2003); (Dekker & Engbersen, 2013); (Nadia Caidi et al., 2008); (Beyan et al., 2016).

5. Limitations and future work

5.1 Limitation

   This systematic report was time restricted so the review only included published journal articles, conference paper and organization report that is written in the English language. There is a chance of bias when selecting inclusive and exclusive criteria because of limited human resource. Studies were only searched in three databases and articles in grey literature and on-going studies were not included.

   There were also limited studies that answered SQ2 and for SQ4, more studies focused on how governmental/non-governmental or humanitarian organization provide resettlement information but doesn’t mention if it is ICT related.

5.2 Future work

   As discussed in the limitation section of this review and discovered from the studies, there are some interesting topics that can be a valid start for future researchers.

   Most of the studies in this review show that refugees/immigrants’ use ICT/SM for integration but how does a responsible public organization or government of host countries address the information need of refugees/immigrants?

   How about age, economic and social differences when providing resettlement information? Do refugees/immigrants visit local government websites for resettlement and integration?

   How do host-countries address the media need of young children, old generation and refugee women, what kind of information technology integration can be applied? How about economic and social differences when providing resettlement information?

   It was also discussed in the result section that using these technologies doesn’t guarantee their social inclusion, and post usage of these technologies and their influence should be identified for a better integrating process.
6. Summary and conclusion

In this SLR, 18 studies were selected and included in the review. It was discovered that most of the studies answered the research question. It was found that even if refugees/immigrants face a lot of difficulties that lead to economic, health and social differences in the new community, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Social Media (SM) plays a big role in their migration and resettlement process.

ICT/SM help refugees to retain stronger ties with their family and friends in their origin countries and also assists to create personal networks among new people and maintain existed ones. They facilitate communication and helps them to keep their relationship and be intimate with “strong ties”, creates a communication with “weak ties” and help maintain a connection/communication with “latent ties” and facilitate information access about migration (Lástiłowá, 2014); (Dekker & Engbersen, 2013); (Mesch, 2012); (Phillips et al., 2016).

But even if ICTs/SMs plays a big role in the process of migration and resettlement among refugees/immigrants, usage of the technology doesn’t guarantee their social inclusion, they still need physical contact. (Phillips et al., 2016); (Andrade & Doolin, 2016).

Refugee’s pre and post-migration experience determine their use and choice of ICTs/SMs in their “resettlement”, “adjustment” and “integration” in a new society. Refugees/immigrants social, cultural and educational background, affordability, the area of residence and age also determines the type of media they choose to use (Dekker & Engbersen, 2013).

It is now accepted that public and institutional organizations should give a big emphasis to effectively utilize ICTs and SM for better integration of refugees/immigrants. They should also consider their media need and consumption to focus on those Media to convey resettlement information. The involvement of the public will undoubtedly help in the integration process, but a change of this kind takes time and the government should not only focus on integrating refugees but also should work on raising awareness among the host society.

References


