

Between Inclusion and Isolation: The Influence of Social Media Algorithms on Intercultural Education and Equity

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Между приобщаването и изолацията:

Влиянието на алгоритмите в социалните медии върху межкултурното образование и равенството

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Abstract

As social media increasingly dominate human interactions, the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in determining the integration processes of immigrant students in host societies has become a central theme in educational research. This study sheds light on the dual influence of social media algorithms on the integration of immigrant students within the Greek educational context. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 102 educators in order to examine their perceptions of AI as either a bridge or a barrier to inclusion. Data reveal a lack of consensus concerning the effectiveness of AI to create bonds between immigrant students and members of the local school community, with a significant percentage of respondents remaining neutral, suggesting that the influence of algorithms is often invisible. Analysis of the data further reveals that even though algorithms can facilitate integration by exposing users to diverse content, they can also reinforce stereotypes by creating filter bubbles. Educators expressed concerns about data privacy, the spread of misinformation, and the dissemination of xenophobic narratives resulting from the presence of AI in the digital world. The study concludes that for AI to foster inclusion, systemic changes are needed, including content moderation and diverse representation. The importance of this study lies in its ability to reveal the hidden digital barriers that often impede students' integration in educational settings. These findings can have direct applications for educational policies, highlighting the need for AI-specific digital literacy training for educators and the development of more transparent algorithmic curation.

Keywords: social media, algorithms, artificial intelligence, integration, exclusion, education

Резюме

Тъй като социалните медии все повече доминират в човешките взаимодействия, ролята на изкуствения интелект (ИИ) при определянето на процесите на интеграция на учениците имигранти в приемащите общества се превърна в централна тема в образователните изследвания. Това проучване хвърля светлина върху двойното влияние на алгоритмите на социалните медии върху интеграцията на учениците имигранти в гръцкия образователен контекст. Използвайки смесен подход, бяха събрани данни от 102 преподаватели, за да се изследват техните възприятия за ИИ като мост или бариера пред приобщаването. Данните разкриват липса на консенсус относно ефективността на ИИ за създаване на връзки между учениците имигранти и членовете на местната училищна

общност, като значителен процент от респондентите остават неутрални, което предполага, че влиянието на алгоритмите често е невидимо. Анализът на данните допълнително разкрива, че въпреки че алгоритмите могат да улеснят интеграцията, като излагат потребителите на разнообразно съдържание, те могат също така да засилят стереотипите, като създават филтърни балони. Преподавателите изразиха загриженост относно поверителността на данните, разпространението на дезинформация и разпространението на ксенофобски наративи, произтичащи от наличието на ИИ в дигиталния свят. Проучването заключава, че за да насърчи ИИ приобщаването, са необходими системни промени, включително модерирание на съдържанието и разнообразно представителство. Значението на това проучване се състои в способността му да разкрие скритите дигитални бариери, които често възпрепятстват интеграцията на учениците в образователната среда. Тези открития могат да имат директни приложения за образователните политики, подчертавайки необходимостта от обучение по дигитална грамотност, специфично за изкуствения интелект, за преподавателите и разработването на по-прозрачно алгоритмично куриране.

Ключови думи: социални медии, алгоритми, изкуствен интелект, интеграция, изключване, образование

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Over the past few years, social media platforms have become an integral part of contemporary life. Not only have they become the principal tool of communication for younger generations, but also a means through which information is accessed and disseminated. Social media has become so dominant that it can determine social cohesion by constructing online communities and social ties. Digital spaces have been transformed and now constitute the principal interfaces for both cultural preservation and integration. The emergence of new technologies and the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into social media platforms have triggered significant changes in user experiences by altering the mechanisms through which users interact on the platforms. Algorithms now curate content feeds, personalising user experiences and shaping, in this way, an individual's journey towards inclusion or isolation in the local society. These latest technological innovations have created bridges opening up opportunities for connectivity; at the same time, they have created barriers reinforcing stereotypes and triggering concerns with regard to equity and inclusivity.

On the one hand, the features of AI that are incorporated into social media platforms can function as a bridge for integration, especially for immigrants trying to adapt to their new way of life. By personalising content and providing users with accessibility tools, such as real-time translation of content, it becomes feasible to accelerate the process of sociolinguistic acculturation. A virtual space where immigrants can negotiate their dual identities is fostered by allowing users to both connect with the members of the host society and maintain ties to their heritage. On the other hand, algorithmic biases become apparent and tend to result in social fragmentation, especially when dominant narratives are highly prioritised, and filter bubbles that keep marginal communities digitally segregated are created. As a result, the widespread use of AI has raised multiple concerns with regard to the quality of integration.

Several researchers have addressed the role of social media in community building, with Jebaselvi et al. (2023) arguing that it is the interactive nature of social media that has transformed it into a place where people resort for self-expression. Hanaysha (2017) suggests that sentiments being disseminated on social media can have a significant effect on society as a whole. In general, it is argued that the messages that are conveyed through media are vital for shaping attitudes and forming opinions (Colaioni & Castellano, 2015). Therefore, in the media, existing views can be reinforced, and new perceptions can easily be created (Anggraini,

Widodo, & Albert, 2026). Algorithms constitute a key feature of social media platforms and play a cardinal role in the creation of content.

Though such personalisation of content can enhance the relevance and efficiency of the content users have access to, issues with regard to transparency bias and fragmentation of realities are raised by multiple researchers. Zeng (2020) has expressed concerns about privacy issues as well as user manipulation and misinformation as a result of algorithmic bias. Kumar (2025) acknowledges the fact that the spread of misinformation is associated with algorithms and is particularly attributed to the creation and distribution of deepfakes. Deepfakes, as a term, are used in order to refer to content that is manipulated in such a way that it is not easy for viewers to distinguish real content from fake (Kumar, 2025). Deepfakes seem to be threatening democracy, for this kind of technology is widely being exploited to mislead political content (Chesney & Citron, 2019) and to shape political opinions through deception (Kumar, 2025). It is very often the case that algorithms promote biased content and even ignore certain perspectives, resulting in the marginalisation and exclusion of specific socio-cultural groups (Noble, 2018).

The way immigrants are treated and their integration into host societies is determined to a great extent by new media and the way they are portrayed. Social media platforms have been transformed into spaces where anyone can present their perspective and frame the narrative of immigration (Gruzd, Mai, & Taleb, 2024). Platforms 'affordances have a dual function and, on the one hand, allow for solidarity expression towards immigrant populations and support for their rights while, on the other hand, they can promote restrictive policies and disseminate xenophobic narratives (Ojala, 2021). To be more specific, Steiner & Kim (2026) argue that social media and AI enable cultural communication, and in this way, cross-cultural storytelling as well as heritage preservation becomes feasible. What is more, they support that intercultural understanding is enhanced since empathy is fostered by allowing the public to have access to perspectives that are not in their immediate cultural context. However, there are multiple risks involved because of algorithmic bias. The principal risks outlined by Steiner & Kim (2026) constitute cultural misinterpretation and homogenisation, which often result in stereotype reinforcement, echo chambers, and amplification of misperceptions.

The role of social media and AI technologies in immigrant integration is extended into the classroom environment, where immigrant youth interact directly with the members of the local society. With the aid of AI-driven social media platforms, the integration process can be facilitated, and linguistic or cultural barriers that impede effective communication among peers

can be overcome. Social media platforms can provide immigrants with access to the local community with group recommendations, which function as digital bridges for offline social acceptance. It is very often the case that online environments are transformed into informal learning spaces where collaboration and peer support are fostered (Baskiri & Kowsari, 2024; Elsa & Stephen, 2024; Rincón-Flores, Santos-Guevara, & Yáñez-Figueroa, 2024). However, while AI can offer tremendous opportunities for inclusive learning, it can also present challenges with regard to social cohesion by creating echo chambers and filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011). Even though algorithms have the capacity to connect students and familiarise them with diverse perspectives, if they detect a user's preference for specific content, they tend to prioritise that content. This signifies that for an immigrant student, algorithms might be constantly suggesting content related to his/her country of origin, hindering exposure to the host country's societal norms. What is more, algorithmic bias can be manifested as a lack of representation (Noble, 2018), suggesting that intercultural understanding cannot be raised if the social media feeds of Greek students are devoid of diverse narratives and digital discourse regarding immigrants is framed based on the narrative of seeing the immigrants as the 'Other'. In this way, the student is pre-judged digitally by automated systems, and social barriers are imposed.

The present study aims to examine in more depth the dual function of AI in social media by paying particular attention to the impact it has on intercultural education. It focuses on exploring how AI and algorithms impact immigrant students' integration into the host society by identifying the barriers and facilitators that are created. It further places emphasis on better understanding the perceptions of educators concerning the role of AI in fostering inclusivity and integration. By addressing these issues, the study attempts to unravel whether AI contributes to narrowing inequalities or exacerbating them.

The significance of this research lies in its thorough analysis of the interplay between AI, algorithms, social media platforms, and intercultural education within the socio-political climate of Greece. Given the growing number of immigrants residing in the country, reaching a more profound understanding of the influence of social media algorithms on the formation of equitable learning environments constitutes a necessity. By emphasising the key role of social media and AI in the integration process, this research contributes to ongoing discussions on equity and democratic participation in educational contexts.

Methods and Materials

The present study adopted a mixed-method approach to research in order to examine the role of AI in social media as a bridge or barrier to intercultural education. By implementing *Postmodernism Problems / Проблеми на постмодерността* Vol.16 , No.1 , 2026, ISSN: 1314-3700, <https://pmpjournal.org> <https://doi.org/10.46324/PMP2601079>

both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study aimed at a more in-depth understanding of participants' experiences with AI-driven social media platforms. For the selection of the participants of the study, a purposive sampling strategy was employed, targeting individuals working in the field of education. Demographic factors, including age, gender, and digital literacy, were taken into consideration to ensure representation across diverse groups.

Data were collected by distributing a structured questionnaire including both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section focused on the role of AI as a facilitator in the integration process of immigrant students, whereas the second section placed emphasis on its role as a barrier to integration. These sections included solely closed-ended questions that addressed issues related to AI's impact on inclusivity and educational equity. The third section consisted of three open-ended questions requiring participants to draw upon their personal experiences and their views on risks involved in the use of AI in social media platforms and the changes that should be implemented in their function.

Quantitative responses from Likert-scale and multiple-choice items were analysed employing descriptive statistics in order to identify trends and patterns across participant groups. Qualitative responses from open-ended questions were analysed with the aid of thematic analysis and involved coding responses, identifying recurrent themes, and interpreting patterns. Ethical considerations were central to the research design since participants' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study. Moreover, informed consent was obtained by the participants before data collection, with participants being explicitly informed about the voluntary nature of their participation and their ability to withdraw.

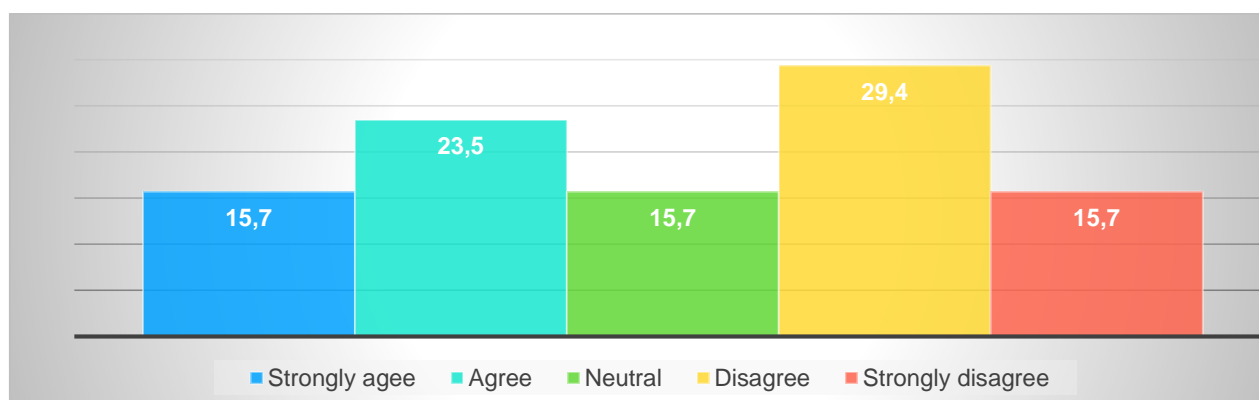
Results

A total of 102 participants were involved in the study, providing a diverse sample. The age distribution was relatively balanced with a slightly higher representation of participants aged 26-35 (n = 23) and those over 55 (n = 23), followed by individuals aged 46-55 (n = 19), 26-45 (n = 19), and 18-25 (n = 18). Gender representation was evenly distributed, with 49 male and 49 female respondents, while a small number preferred not to disclose their gender. About digital literacy, the majority of participants identified as having intermediate (n = 42) or advanced (n = 29) digital literacy skills, with fewer being at a novice (n = 18) or expert (n = 13) level.

The first section of the questionnaire examined perceptions of artificial intelligence as a facilitator of integration. Data revealed that 29.4% of the respondents do not consider that AI translation tools can help to overcome linguistic barriers for immigrant students, whereas a significant 23.5% believe that they are effective enough (Fig. 1). Overall, there seems to be an absence of consensus with regard to the effectiveness of AI translation tools and opinions are distributed across the full range of response categories.

Figure 1

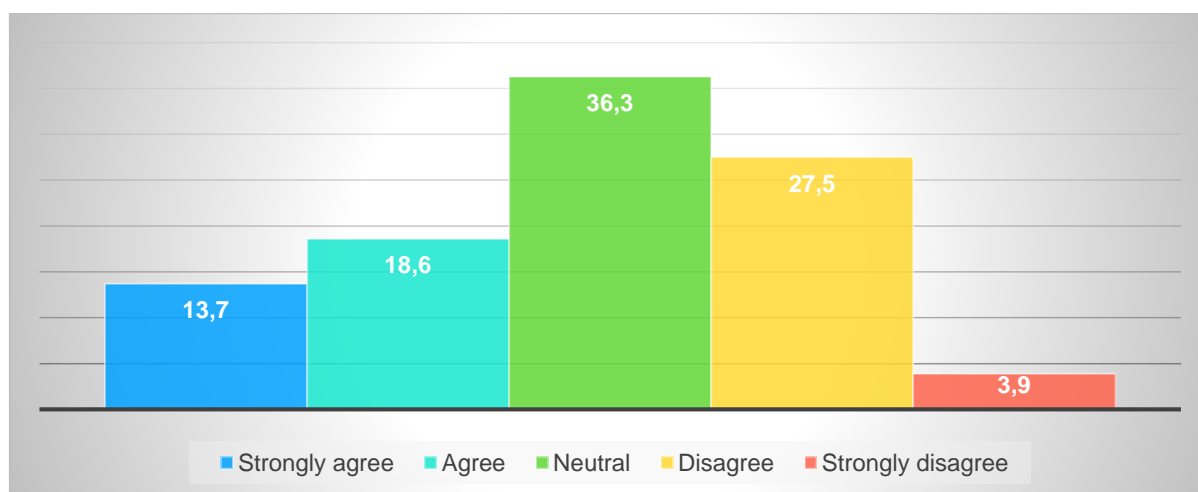
AI translation tools on social media effectively reduce linguistic barriers for immigrant students



Responses to the statement that algorithmic recommendations constitute a contributory factor in immigrant students' connection to the local community were predominantly neutral (36.3%), suggesting that a significant percentage of the respondents remains uncertain about the ability of algorithms to actively support social integration (Fig. 2).

Figure 2

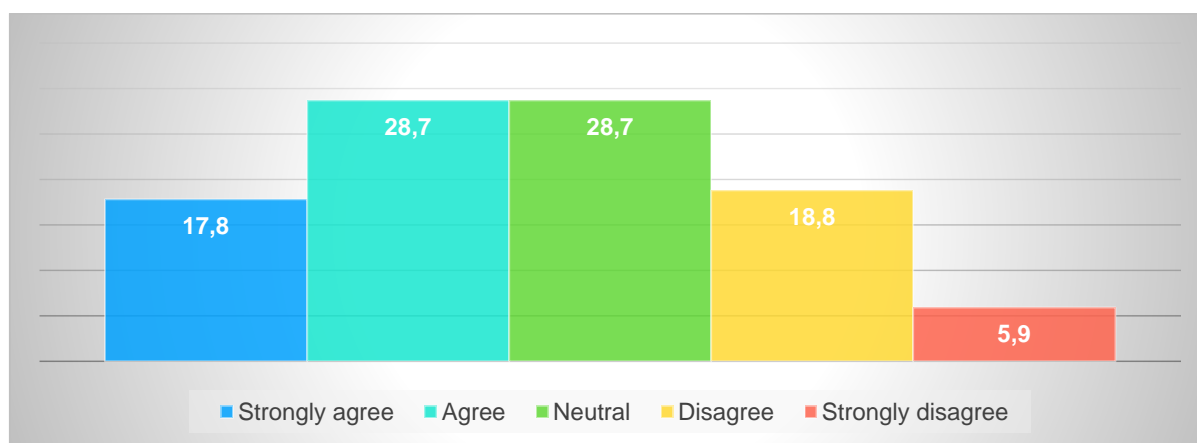
Social media algorithmic recommendations help immigrant students connect with local community groups



Responses to the statement that AI allows immigrant students to both maintain ties with their heritage and explore the culture of the host society were mostly positive with fewer respondents expressing disagreement suggesting a tendency to view AI as being supportive of bicultural engagement despite the fact that a substantial percentage of the respondents (28.7%) did not have a clear-cut opinion on the issue (Fig. 3).

Figure 3

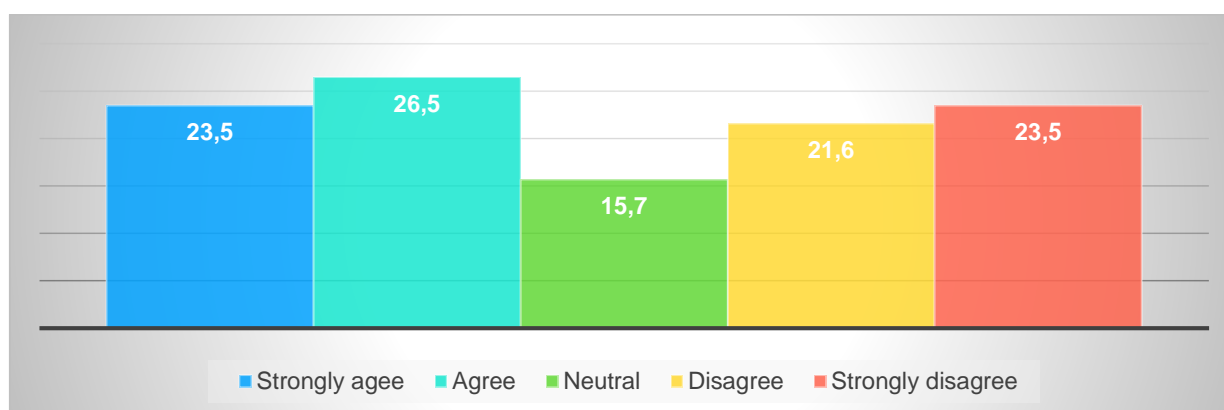
AI-driven social media platforms allow immigrant students to maintain ties with their heritage while exploring the host society's culture



The statement that algorithms can create empathy by exposing students to diverse cultural perspectives elicited positive responses, with 26.5% of the respondents expressing their agreement with the statement, compared to a 21.6% of the respondents who expressed their disagreement, or a 15.7% who remained neutral on the issue. This distribution suggests that the belief that AI can promote intercultural understanding is widely accepted in the Greek socio-cultural context (Fig. 4).

Figure 4

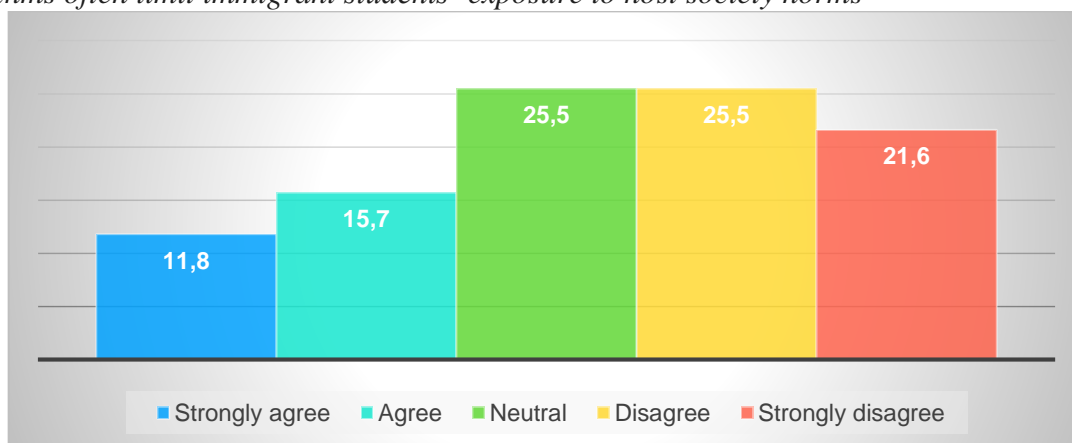
AI-driven social media platforms foster empathy by exposing students to diverse cultural perspectives



The second section of the questionnaire focused on AI as a potential barrier to integration. Responses to the statement that algorithms impose limitations on exposure to host society norms were predominantly negative (25.5%), with a 15.7% indicating agreement, suggesting that for most respondents, algorithms do not constrain access to content that represents the host society's cultural norms (Fig. 5).

Figure 5

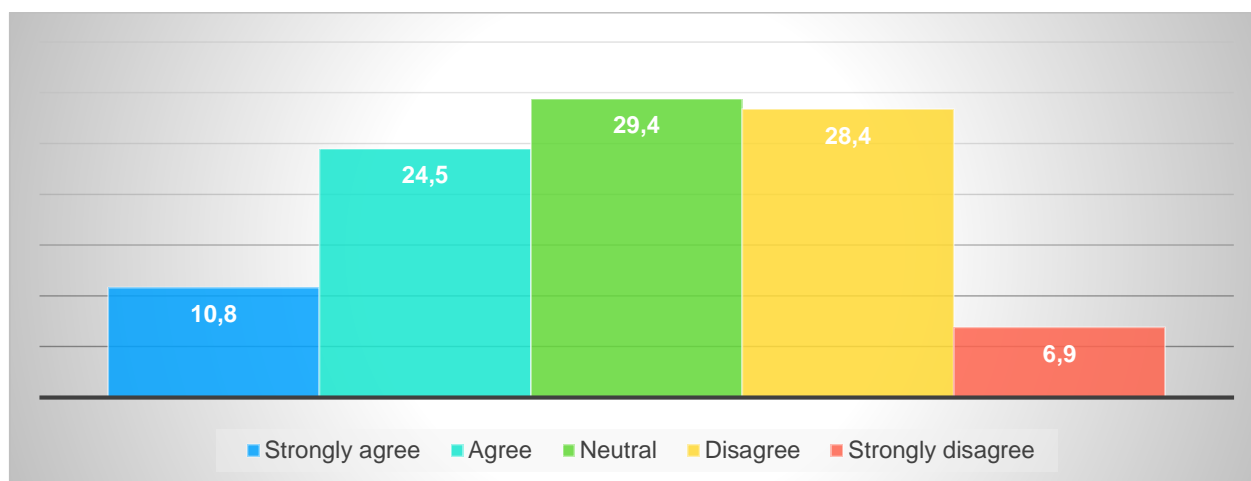
Algorithms often limit immigrant students' exposure to host society norms



When asked whether algorithmic bias reinforces negative stereotypes or xenophobic narratives, responses were mixed, and a significant number of respondents (29.4%) did not adopt a clear stance, indicating that the question addressed a controversial issue for which not everyone could be certain (Fig. 6).

Figure 6

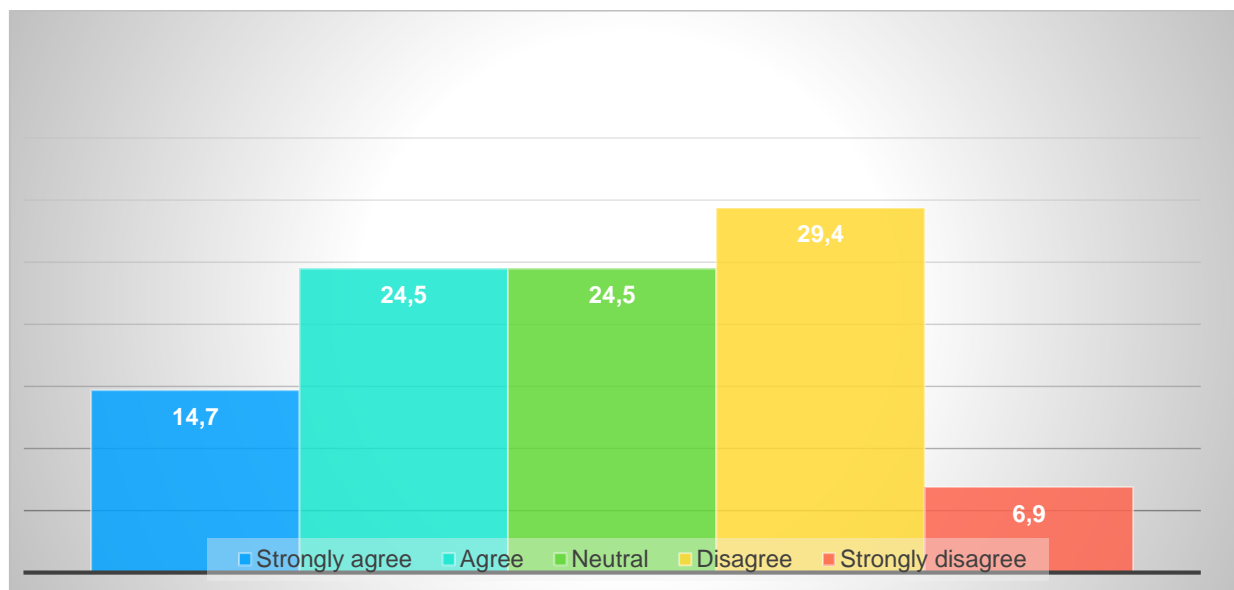
Algorithmic bias reinforces negative stereotypes or xenophobic narratives regarding immigrants



A similar pattern emerged for the statement addressing the lack of diverse representation in content feeds, with 24.5% of the respondents expressing their agreement with the statement, 29.4% their disagreement, and 24.5% adopting a neutral stance. This distribution indicates that there is some degree of variability in respondents' experiences and thus, there is no dominant perception of the diversity presented in algorithmically curated content (Fig. 7).

Figure 7

There is a lack of diverse representation in the content feeds



Overall, the findings of the study suggest that perceptions of AI in social media are characterised by variability rather than strong consensus. While certain aspects of AI, such as those which are related to cultural maintenance, are viewed more positively, other aspects, including translation effectiveness, are perceived in a more negative light. Moreover, even though issues regarding limited exposure to diverse content and the spread of stereotypes are acknowledged by a significant number of respondents, they are not dominant. Responses to the open-ended questions provided insight into respondents' personal experiences and perceptions of AI and its role in promoting interculturality. A total of 80 responses were received for the question, which required respondents to reflect and describe a specific instance of algorithms assisting or imposing barriers to the integration of students into the local school community. The majority of responses provided were rather general in nature; however, it was still possible for several themes to emerge. Educators observed that algorithms can serve as facilitators for integration, either via group or friend suggestions made by social media algorithms, translation tools, or content related to the host society. More specifically, a respondent described the case of a student joining online communities where he/she interacted with members of the local

school community before face-to-face interaction, rendering the integration process easier and smoother. Other educators, though, observed that algorithms may hinder the integration process as students tend to become isolated in the virtual world, interacting predominantly with people of their own origin using their native language. Some educators even noted that algorithms can result in the spread of hatred and xenophobic attitudes, citing a particular instance where a student, seeing immigrants being portrayed as illegal, started accusing an immigrant student of being illegal as well.

Respondents were also asked to express their concerns with regard to the use of AI in controlling or guiding online interactions. A total of 100 responses were received, with the major theme emerging being privacy and data surveillance. The majority of respondents expressed their concern about how personal data is treated and protected. Another theme that emerged was the spread of misinformation and of content promoting hatred and violence. Several respondents also addressed the cognitive and social impact of social media by expressing their concern that AI imposes limits on the development of students' critical thinking skills and results in students becoming addicted and isolated by constantly exposing them to content of their liking.

The question requiring respondents to suggest changes so that intercultural education and social cohesion can be better supported accumulated 97 responses. Most respondents argued that algorithms should expose students to diverse content, having a balance between local and home-culture information, so as to prevent isolation. Additionally, respondents advocated for shifting the logic underlying group and friend suggestions made by algorithms and suggested no longer prioritising ethnic similarity but rather shared interests. Respondents further suggested the integration of new technical features, such as real-time translation tools, so as to reduce the linguistic barriers often confronted by immigrants when navigating digital spaces. Finally, respondents expressed their desire for stricter moderation of content and, more specifically, of content that promotes hatred and stereotypes. Overall, the proposals made represented the need to create a respectful and protected intercultural space where all feel welcome.

Discussion

The results of the present study highlight the dual function of AI-driven social media since they act as both a bridge and a barrier to integration. Several useful insights can be gained by analysing the data gathered. One significant finding is that there is a lack of consensus with regard to the effectiveness of AI translation tools, with the majority of the respondents

questioning the capability of AI to eliminate linguistic barriers. This skepticism expressed can be attributed to the fact that mechanical translation is not able to capture the cultural context, which is most of the time required for sociolinguistic acculturation to be fully achieved. Moreover, data reveal that while the majority of respondents agree that AI helps preserve ties with one's heritage and, at the same time, interact with the host society, there is concern about immigrant students interacting solely with members of their own culture. Responses to open-ended questions confirm the fact that students often become isolated in digital spaces where they engage in interaction with other users of the same origin. Thus, supporting the concern expressed by respondents that algorithms tend to assign priority to ethnic similarity.

Another interesting finding involves respondents' views on algorithmic bias and its impact on the spread of stereotypes and xenophobia. Responses were mixed on the issue, but data collected from open-ended questions offer insight into the effects it has on the reinforcement of stereotypical perceptions of immigrants. Specific references to instances of students adopting social media narratives framing immigrants as illegal demonstrate how digital narratives can result in offline discrimination. Finally, it is worth highlighting the high number of respondents not taking a clear stance towards the issues being raised. Such high percentages of neutral responses across several categories could indicate that the influence of algorithms may not always be visible as a result of their complex and dual nature. It could also be suggesting that even though a 41.2% of the respondents claim to have digital literacy at an intermediate level and solely 23.7% categorised themselves as being novice, educators in the Greek educational context are not fully aware of the underlying principles governing social media platforms and the digital world, and thus, possess superficial knowledge.

Conclusions

The present study examined the interplay between AI, social media algorithms, and their role in the integration processes of immigrant students in the Greek educational context. The findings suggest that AI-driven social media platforms can open up tremendous opportunities for solidarity; however, they simultaneously carry multiple challenges and risks, which involve digital segregation and reinforcement of stereotypes. By controlling the content users have access to, AI can both endorse intercultural awareness and understanding and create filter bubbles that result in exclusion. In addition, the study reveals that the effects that algorithms can have are not always visible to educators, even when they have some level of digital literacy. However, they are deeply concerned about the ethical implications of AI concerning data privacy, the spread of misinformation, and algorithmic bias. These concerns underlie the fact

that intentional systemic changes need to be applied, and educators should undergo training for their effective use. For intercultural education to reach its goal, social media platforms should shift their priorities and foster diversity and equal representation. By addressing these challenges, technological developments can serve as a bridge that brings equity and inclusion.

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