SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON INTEGRATION INTENTION OF IMMIGRANTS TO SINGAPORE

Research regarding immigration is a contemporary issue among major western countries. As a wealthy city-state and a self-identified ‘global city’ with a demand for global talents, Singapore has become a leading destination for international migrants. Immigration contributes remarkably to Singapore’s demographic structure. According to the Singapore Department of Statistics (Population and Population Structure, 2019), the total population of Singapore is 5.7 million in 2019 which consists of approximately 61.4% citizens, 9.2% permanent residents and 29.4% non-residents. As a result, migrants played an important role in Singapore’s population structure but the government’s liberal immigration policy welcoming foreign talents and migrant workers has brought integration challenges. The rapid increase of immigrants has triggered increasing criticism, dissatisfaction and resentment from locals (Yang, Yang, & Zhan, 2017). People from different ethnic backgrounds vary in their belief systems, values, customs and behaviours whilst interacting (Kosic & Phalet, 2006). Local-migrant relations are thus experiencing stereotyping, misunderstanding and divisiveness (Lai, 2012). With tight restrictions on traditional media outlets, indignation over the government’s welcoming attitudes towards foreign immigrants began in the early 2000s with the rise of online media forums, and the continuing spread of smartphones and social media has provided additional outlets for nativist sentiment and xenophobic content.

This negative online discourse has affected Singaporean residents’ views and interaction with immigrants and vice versa. Most existing research on Singapore’s immigration issues has focused on exploring the negative problems or conflicts brought by immigrants from the perspective of the host, but rarely discuss the instrumental integration intention from the view of immigrants’ point. In comparison, this proposal aims firstly to investigate how xenophobia encountered online has affected the integration intention of immigrants to Singapore (RQ1). The second purpose of this proposal is to explore what role social media has played in the integration of immigrants (RQ2).

This research takes advantage of the interdisciplinary perspectives of Sociology and Communication Studies, combining the sociological discussion of the integration of immigrants and communication studies of social media.

SCOPE OF WORK FOR SELECTED PHD STUDENT

The student is expected to employ a mixed-methods approach. For RQ1, semi-structured interview will be employed. Building upon the identified identity profiles, in-depth semi-structured interviews about the construction of identities, social integration, and social media use with 100 immigrants across Permanent Residents foreign talents, migrant workers and recently naturalized citizens will be interviewed.

The aim of the interviews is to understand 1) their knowledge and reaction to xenophobic online discourse; 2) to understand their responses on social media to cause their inclusionary (assimilation) / exclusionary (separation) intention with regard to Singapore.

For RQ2, as this research studies the correlation between online xenophobic sentiment and interviewees’ reaction and related effects, social media data scraping and textual analysis approach will study the online discourses. As studying languages require time-intensive qualitative approaches,
computational linguistics provides techniques to study languages at scale, requiring considerably less time and resources.

Numerous social media platforms allow researchers to access data (Kern, et al., 2016). Platforms like Facebook even provide data reaching beyond the boundaries of the platform, such as liking content, posting photos, and interacting with friends represent behavioural patterns that are unlikely to be limited to Facebook (Kosinski, et al., 2015). Data scraping will be conducted order to obtain a necessary amount of data (a dataset) for study, which is an automated data collection process with the help of computer software (Text mining & text analysis, 2018). This process requires key words and language patterns to filter out screen out the relevant discourses; since language is usually changeable with ambiguities, multiple word senses and uses, and slang, a language model is needed to be developed. After obtaining a dataset, information will need to be extracted and converted into a usable form for later analysis (Kern, et al., 2016).