Use of Social Platforms for the Development of Intercultural Competence in the Process of Language Learning

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ABSTRACT:

The digitalization of the educational space and the growth of social media platforms have changed the conditions in which the formation of foreign language and intercultural competence of students takes place. At the same time, higher education largely does not keep up with this shift, creating a contradiction between the real digital practices of young people and traditional approaches to language learning. The purpose of the article is determining the pedagogical validity and practical expediency of using social platforms as a tool for the formation of intercultural communicative competence. The theoretical basis of the study is the model of intercultural communicative competence by Byram (2020), the process concept of the Intercultural Communicative Competence by Deardorff (2020), the concept of the "third space" by Kramsch (1993), as well as theoretical analysis, comparative analysis, content analysis and theoretical modeling of pedagogical conditions. Social media has been established to function as an authentic intercultural space that provides immersion in the target language and culture. Five key pedagogical conditions for the effective use of platforms in language teaching have been identified: target orientation of tasks, selection of authentic content, reflective support, orientation to communicative practices of students and digital competence of the teacher. Forms of pedagogically organized intercultural interaction have shown the ability to form intercultural sensitivity even in conditions of physical isolation from the natural language environment.

Keywords: intercultural competence, social media, language education, digital pedagogy, foreign language

1. Introduction

The global transformations of recent decades have radically changed not only the economic or political landscape, but also the very logic of how a person learns, develops and enters professional life. There is more information around than ever, but the paradox is that most of it remains inaccessible to those who do not speak foreign languages – and not because the information is hidden, but because the language barrier is more reliable than any lock that cuts off a person from full participation in world processes. However, language is only a surface. Deeper lies something more complex: the ability to think in terms of another culture, to feel its internal logic, to recognize what is never formulated out loud, but determines everything - from the manner of conducting a conversation to the way of making decisions.

The modern labor market sets requirements for specialists that a generation ago would have seemed the prerogative of diplomats or top managers of multinational corporations: to freely navigate in the international environment, build trust through cultural differences, speak and hear so that you are understood not only literally. Traditionally, it was believed that the only way to develop these skills was to physically find yourself among native speakers of another language: to live, study, work abroad, immerse yourself in someone else's life. Today, this option is not available to millions of people – because of the war, because of economic circumstances, because of restrictions that cannot be circumvented by their own efforts. However, just when physical mobility is declining, the digital space is expanding. Social media platforms, which until recently were associated mainly with entertainment and self-presentation, have evolved into an environment where billions of acts of intercultural communication take place every day. A person can, without leaving the room, find himself in a conversation with an inhabitant of another continent, feel the rhythm of a foreign language, face an incomprehensible joke or an unexpected reaction - and it is in this collision that real learning begins. It is noteworthy that some platforms have already integrated the function of automatic translation in real time, but this decision only exacerbates the fundamental issue: automatic translation conveys words, but does not convey content, and human understanding begins exactly where words end.

Scientific interest in digital platforms as a tool for language learning has been formed for a long time, but in recent years it has acquired a new acuteness, due to the rapid growth of the social media audience and the changing nature of intercultural interaction in the digital space (Byram, 2020; Deardorff, 2020; Alizadeh & Cowie, 2025). Researchers record a fundamental shift: social networks have ceased to be a peripheral tool and have become the main environment in which students form linguistic and cultural competencies outside the classroom (Dolozhevska & Martyniuk, 2025; Riabchun & Melnyk, 2024).

Despite the growing body of empirical research on individual platforms and formats of digital interaction, the scientific literature still lacks a systematic understanding of the pedagogical conditions under which social media really becomes a tool for the formation of intercultural competence, and does not remain a background for inappropriate content consumption. The question remains unresolved about which characteristics of the digital learning environment are fundamental for the development of various components of the Intercultural Communicative Competence (further – ICC), such as cognitive, affective, behavioral and reflective. It is this gap between the wide availability of platforms and the lack of methodological conceptualization of their educational potential that determines the relevance of the proposed study (Kurasova et al., 2026; Dolozhevska & Martyniuk, 2025).

2. Literature Review

Scientific interest in digital platforms as a tool for language learning is not new, but in recent years it has acquired new sharpness and concreteness. The theoretical basis for the study of intercultural competence in language teaching was laid by the works of Byram (1997), who developed a model of ICC, which combines five interrelated components: openness and curiosity in relation to other cultures (attitudes), knowledge about culture and socio-cultural practices (knowledge), the ability to interpret and establish connections between cultural phenomena (skills of interpreting and relating), the ability to discover new and skills of discovery and interaction, as well as critical cultural awareness. Byram's concept remains fundamental to all subsequent discourse on the ICC and is being actively rethought in connection with the digitalization of education (Maloivan & Dyrda, 2025; Kurasova et al., 2026).

It should be noted that the concept of the "third space" proposed by K. Kramsch as early as 1993 (Kramsch, 1993), acquires a new sound in the digital age, since social media functions precisely as such a space where students can freely move between their native and target cultures, constructing their own intercultural identity without rigid boundaries of formal audience interaction. According to researchers, it is in this "third space" that the most organic formation of cultural openness, critical thinking and the ability to dialogue takes place. In particular, a copying review by Alizadeh and Cowie (2025), dedicated to technologically mediated intercultural virtual exchanges (further – VE), confirmed that VE is a flexible and inclusive pedagogical model that promotes the development of both language skills, primarily speaking, and intercultural competence through collaborative and reflection tasks (Alizadeh & Cowie, 2025). The authors note that despite the widespread use of platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp and Google services, only a small part of the research integrates augmented reality and artificial intelligence technologies, which outlines promising areas for the development of the industry.

Zhu (2025) focused on non-formal English language learning through social media communities. An analysis of educational communities and the practices of their participants confirmed that platforms provide access to authentic materials, live broadcasting, and cultural practices, significantly increasing motivation and cognitive engagement. At the same time, the researcher emphasizes that social networks do not replace formal education, but act as a valuable complement to it (Zhu, 2025).

A similar position is defended by Moreno Celeghin (2024), analyzing the development of intercultural communicative competence by means of WhatsApp in the process of learning Italian as a foreign language by adult students. Micro-activities in the format of online interaction contributed not only to the practice of language skills, but also to the observation of the cultural characteristics of the target language community, forming the capacity for cultural reflection (Moreno Celeghin, 2024). These conclusions are consistent with the data obtained in domestic studies: Solomakha and Loboda (2021) found that most students use social networks mainly for entertainment and communication, while their purposeful use in teaching foreign languages remains infrequent and requires methodological support from the teacher.

Riabchun and Melnyk (2024) addressed the question of how students use social media in the process of learning a foreign language. The research field has spanned platforms such as Duolingo, Memrise, Busuu, HelloTalk, and YouTube. The main conclusion turned out to be important: these resources are not reduced to the function of the simulator, they create conditions for natural communicative practice, during which vocabulary is enriched not through cramming, but through the real context of use. A radically different angle was chosen by Konyukova and Sydorovska (2022): they were interested not so much in how platforms help to learn a language, but in how they change the nature of cultural interaction. The researchers concluded that social networks are unique primarily in that they remove the compulsion of cultural contact: a person

enters another culture voluntarily, at his own pace, gradually embedding its elements into his perception of the world. Dolozhevska and Martyniuk (2025) posed the question differently: if students already spend most of their free time on social networks, is the rejection of this resource in the educational process a deliberate pedagogical mistake? Their answer is unequivocal: platforms have a real didactic potential, but it is realized only when there is a meaningful methodological strategy behind their use, and not a simple "I allow". Aristova (2026) goes beyond individual platforms and considers the digitalization of education as a systemic shift that rethinks the very nature of learning. In its concept, social networks, specialized platforms, augmented and virtual reality technologies are not peripheral additions, but central elements of the modern educational environment, capable of qualitatively accelerating the development of intercultural competence when properly applied.

Buchatska and Synorub (2026) focus on the specifics of journalistic education and raise the question of how the socio-cultural competence of the future journalist is formed in the process of language training. Their argument is compelling: a journalist who does not understand the cultural context inevitably remains at the level of an external observer – he sees the surface, but does not understand the mechanics. Separately, the authors consider authentic video materials as an independent didactic tool that not only illustrates, but also directly forms socio-cultural sensitivity.

Mykhalchuk (2025) investigated the peculiarities of the formation of intercultural competence directly in French lessons. The study showed that language and culture are inseparable in the educational process: mastering authentic French-language material, such as videos, press texts, film fragments, not only expands the language repertoire of students, but also forms their understanding of the socio-cultural logic of French society. The author emphasizes that the greatest effect is achieved when the cultural component is not an appendix to the language material, but is organically integrated into the structure of the lesson from the first line of the text to the last communicative task (Mykhalchuk, 2025).

Researchers outside Ukraine are moving in a consonant direction. Benlamri (2024) focused on how digital internet tools affect the intercultural competence of students mastering English as a foreign language, and concluded that a smartphone in the hands of a student is no longer just a communication device, but a portable cultural space where there are no geographical boundaries: Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and related platforms do not provide acquaintance with another culture through description, but direct interaction with its speakers - live, contextual, unpredictable.

Pohorelova (2023) addressed the issue of the formation of intercultural business competence in students of non-language specialties in foreign language classes. The researcher convincingly proves that the future specialist of a non-philological profile needs not so much academic knowledge of the language as the ability to function in real intercultural business situations: negotiate, read non-verbal signals, adapt communicative behavior to the cultural context of the partner. Accordingly, foreign language classes for non-language specialties should be built around authentic cases and simulations of business interaction, rather than grammatical exercises in isolation from the cultural context (Pohorielova, 2023).

Research Objectives (Aims)

The purpose of the study is to determine the pedagogical validity and practical expediency of using social platforms as a tool for the formation of intercultural competence in the language education system. Achieving this goal involves solving the following tasks. 1. To systematize the existing theoretical approaches to understanding intercultural competence in the context of language education. 2. To analyze the current state of scientific research on the pedagogical potential of social media platforms in the formation of the ICC. 3. To characterize the specifics of the leading social platforms through the prism of their didactic capabilities. 4. To identify and substantiate the key pedagogical

conditions for the effective use of social media in the process of language learning.

3. Materials and Methods

The methodological basis of the study is a set of interrelated approaches, each of which performs its own function in the general research logic. The analysis of scientific literature provided a wide coverage of domestic and foreign sources in the field of intercultural communication, digital pedagogy and media space. The procedures of synthesis and generalization made it possible to go beyond individual observations and formulate general trends. The comparative method was used to compare different types of digital environments – global social networks, instant messengers, and specialized language applications (Konyukova & Sydorovska, 2022). The classification and typology of platforms made it possible to systematize them according to their functional purpose and didactic capabilities.

4. Results

The concept of intercultural competence exists in scientific circulation in two versions: both general (Intercultural Competence (IC) and so language-oriented (Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), and both have long occupied a central place in discussions about the goals and content of modern education. There is not a single universally accepted definition here and, probably, there cannot be, these are too different theoretical traditions and research contexts in which this concept developed. However, it is this variety of approaches that allows you to get a three-dimensional rather than a flat idea of the phenomenon.

Among the theoretical models, the ICC concept, developed by Michael Byram, occupies an important place. In the updated edition of "Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence: revisited" (Byram, 2020), the researcher revised his classical model, significantly enriching it in terms of content: the main emphasis shifts from linguistic correctness to the ability to build relationships, and this shift is fundamental precisely when it comes to social platforms, where communication is always concrete, personal, situational. Bayram also insists on a distinction between "teaching a foreign language" and "foreign language education", arguing that the ICC cannot be an optional component, it must permeate the entire educational process.

Darla Deirdorf builds a fundamentally different theoretical space. In her work "Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies: Story Circles" (Deardorff, 2020), she considers intercultural competence not as a structure with fixed elements, but as a process, namely infinite, non-linear, moving through experience, reflection, mistakes and their comprehension. Competence, in this logic, is not a state that is achieved, but a way of being in a culturally diverse world. It is this idea that makes the Dierdorf model especially productive for analyzing social platforms, where each new conversation is a new situation that requires flexibility, readiness to revise one's assumptions and openness to the unexpected.

The Ukrainian research tradition tends to understand intercultural competence as a holistic personal formation, where no element exists in isolation from others. Kolbina (2026) describes it as an integrative personality quality that arises at the intersection of knowledge, skills and abilities, and in this definition, despite its brevity, something essential is captured: competence does not consist of separate blocks, like a constructor, but is born at the point of their living connection. Vasylenko (2022) shifts the emphasis to the inner dimension: motivation, openness to self-knowledge through an encounter with another, and a willingness to be changed by this meeting are decisive for her. Vasylenko (2022) also emphasizes that external knowledge about someone else's culture without this internal readiness remains dead capital. Despite the differences in accents and terminology, all researchers agree on one thing: ICC is not an awareness of the customs of other peoples and not a set of communicative techniques, but a complex, multidimensional phenomenon in

which knowledge, values, behavior, and the ability to reflect form an inseparable unity. The synthesis of the approaches of Bayram and Deirdorf gives an understanding of the ICC as a living, open, constantly reproduced phenomenon, without which true communication between people of different cultures remains unattainable.

At the same time, in modern scientific discourse, the so-called. "activity-communicative" approach, according to which intercultural competence is formed not by assimilating theoretical knowledge about culture, but through direct immersion in real situations of intercultural interaction. Within this approach, the digital environment is no longer considered as an ordinary "channel" for transmitting information, but as a specific communicative context with its own genre forms, multimodality and cultural codes (Kurasova et al., 2026). Thus, social platforms are turning into a space where the student's linguistic and cultural competencies are formed organically, in the mode of everyday informal interaction.

Before analyzing the pedagogical potential of social networks, it is worth dwelling on the figures that show the scale of the phenomenon in general. As of October 2025, the number of active social media accounts in the world has reached 5.66 billion, meaning that 68.7% of the world's total population uses social media (Kemp, 2025). In fact, this means that social networks have moved into the category of the so-called "supermajority": for every one who does not use them, there are two for whom they are an everyday reality. During 2025 alone, the audience was replenished by another 259 million people, which corresponds to an increase of 4.8% (Kemp, 2025). The following figure is no less indicative: 93.8% of all Internet users on the planet have at least one active account on the social network (Sheikh, 2026). Social media is no longer a choice, it is a medium, and ignoring this fact in education would be, to say the least, intellectually dishonest.

It is characteristic that a modern user is rarely limited to one platform: on average, a person actively uses 6.75 different social platforms every month (Kemp, 2025). The time expenditure is also significant: every day people spend more than 2.5 hours on social and video platforms, and, what is important to emphasize, in its best manifestations, this is by no means empty time, but a space of live communication, cultural exchange and a clash of different ways of seeing the world, the educational potential of which, despite the obviousness, is only beginning to be systematically comprehended by the methodology of teaching foreign languages. According to updated data, for Generation Z, the average daily cost exceeds three hours (Guan, 2026), which in terms of a week is 18 hours and 36 minutes (Sheikh, 2026), almost as long as work shifts last. Ukraine fits into this overall picture without significant deviations: as of October 2025, social networks reach 23 million active users in the country, which is 58.5% of the population (Prostir.ua, 2026). The totality of the above data leads to one conclusion: social networks have long ceased to be an addition to real life, that is, they have become an integral part of it, both in Ukraine and around the world, and education, which pretends as if this did not happen, deliberately abandons the environment built into human everyday life.

Madani (2023), exploring the role of Facebook and YouTube in the development of communicative and cultural competence of students learning English as a foreign language, found that both platforms create significant opportunities for practicing language skills in quasi-real communication situations – students join discussions, comment on videos, interact with native speakers, and gain access to authentic materials 24/7 (Madani, 2023). Deprived of class pressure, applicants can re-watch complex fragments, freely choose content in accordance with their own interests and level of training. Deprivation of evaluative pressure plays no less a role here than an unlimited amount of resources.

Maharani et al. (2025), studying English as a Foreign Language (further –EFL) students' perceptions of the role of social media as a "gateway to global culture", conducted a quantitative study among 30 university students

in Indonesia using the Likert 15-item questionnaire. The results showed a moderately high level of perception (M = 62.60; SD = 8.08): Overall, respondents rated YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok as useful tools for understanding global cultural practices and increasing interest in language learning. At the same time, a noticeable spread of indicators confirmed that cultural enrichment through social networks does not happen automatically: the quality of engagement turns out to be more important than the mere fact of being present on the platform. Students with higher levels of cultural awareness consciously sought out a variety of content and perceived the platforms as a learning resource, while those with lower scores mostly used them for entertainment purposes.

The given data are consonant with the theoretical provisions of L. S. Vygotsky's social constructivism, according to which learning is a process that is socially determined and contextually situational in nature. Social media function as "third spaces" where students align meanings, test stereotypes, and gradually build cross-cultural understanding through interaction with authentic carriers of cultural codes (Maharani et al., 2025).

In the context of specific platforms, it is important to take into account their distinctive genre specifics. YouTube is distinguished by thematic diversity and the possibility of rewatching: listeners learn to distinguish accents, enrich vocabulary, master slang and idiomatic expressions that are usually not found in textbooks. One of the students in the study Madani (2023) noted that it was YouTube that taught her how to navigate culturally labeled statements that never appeared in university classes. Facebook, for its part, provides an opportunity to initiate discussions, join thematic EFL groups and exchange articles and videos; TikTok and Instagram, thanks to their short video format, provide daily contact with living language and current cultural trends.

Dubinina et al. (2025) systematized the advantages of social networks and interactive platforms in the creation of educational content in foreign languages. Researchers distinguish the rapid and wide dissemination of information regardless of the geographical location of the student, the variety of formats for presenting the material, such as videos, infographics, and interactive texts, the joint interaction of all participants in the educational process, receiving feedback in real time, as well as accessibility through any gadgets and the ability to learn at a convenient time (Dubinina et al., 2025). These advantages are especially important in wartime conditions in Ukraine, when the educational process has largely moved to a distance format.

The analysis of scientific sources allows us to highlight a key contradiction: the wide availability of global cultural materials in social networks does not guarantee the automatic development of intercultural competence. The decisive factor is the quality of pedagogical support and the nature of the applicant's involvement. Studies by Kurasova et al. (2026) prove that even resources of the highest quality do not ensure the development of ICC without clearly defined goals, adequate forms of organization of educational activities and reflective support. The pedagogical condition of the target orientation is that the teacher is not only a translator of tasks, but a methodological architect of experience, he outlines in advance which components of the ICC (cognitive, affective, behavioral, discursive, reflective) will develop a specific type of work with a digital resource (Figure 1).

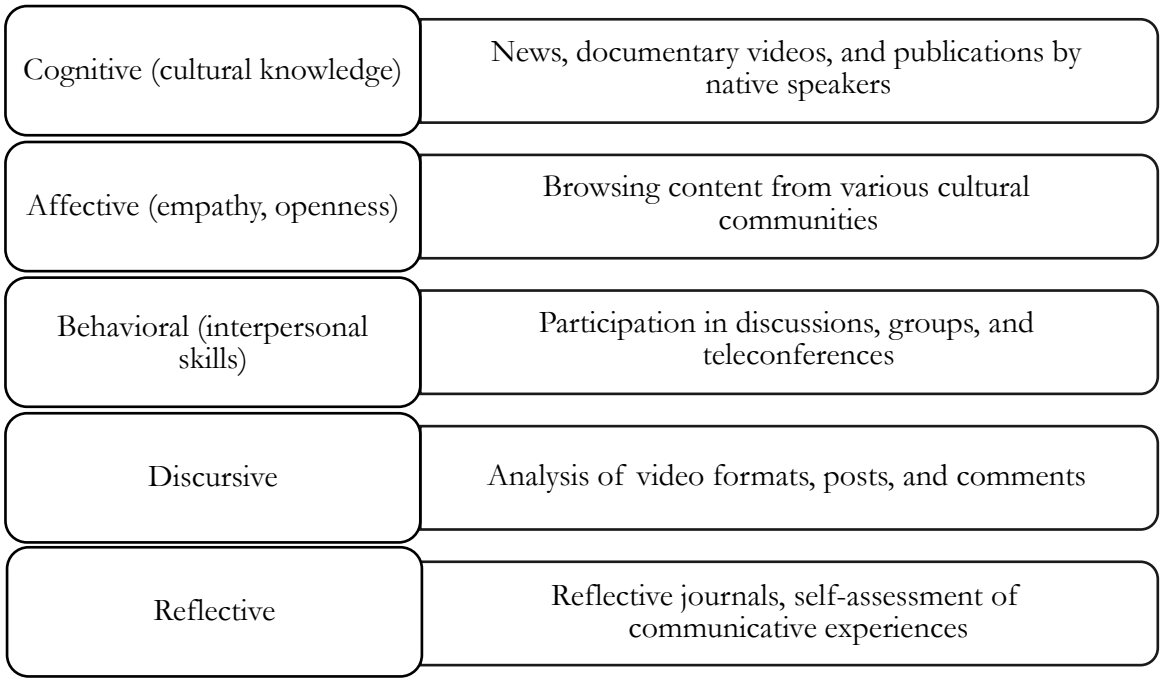

Figure 1. Components of the ICC and didactic capabilities of social platforms
Source: compiled from Kurasova et al. (2026)

Specifying how social networks function as a medium for learning a foreign language, it is worth focusing not on the fact of their existence, but on the mechanisms of language development that they provide. Zhu (2025), analyzing communities of non-formal English language learning on social networks, found that participants of such communities demonstrate a qualitatively different pattern of lexical enrichment compared to those who learn exclusively in a formal environment: new words and constructions are learned not through memorization, but through repeated collision in different authentic contexts – in comments, reactions, responses, memes, where the same word appears each time in a new functional environment. It is this contextual repetition, unattainable in the classroom, that is the key language mechanism of social platforms.

Riabchun and Melnyk (2024), studying the practice of using language platforms and social networks by students of Ukrainian universities, recorded an indicative pattern: applicants who purposefully used HelloTalk and YouTube for language practice demonstrated a noticeably higher level of spontaneous speech development compared to those who limited themselves to classroom classes. Moreover, it was not the amount of time spent on the platforms that was decisive, but the nature of interaction: students who not only consumed content, but also produced their own messages in a foreign language: commented, answered, asked questions, demonstrated significantly higher indicators of communicative flexibility. This conclusion is fundamentally important for the methodology: passive immersion in a foreign language environment of social networks and active linguistic participation in it are qualitatively different learning experiences, and the task of the teacher is precisely to design the second, not the first.

Madani (2023) provides specific examples of how YouTube and Facebook are changing the language behavior of EFL students outside of the classroom. In particular, students who regularly viewed thematic YouTube channels in accordance with their own interests after three months demonstrated a significantly expanded thematic vocabulary in the relevant subject areas, and without any purposeful memorization of vocabulary. At the same time, participation in

Facebook groups, where the discussion was conducted exclusively in the target language, formed the skill of written expression in conditions of real communicative pressure, that is, when the student knows that it will be read by real people, and not just checked by the teacher. It is this communicative pressure of the authentic audience, according to the researcher, that is a powerful motivator of linguistic accuracy, which traditional classroom writing is fundamentally devoid of.

Maharani et al. (2025), in their quantitative study among 30 Indonesian EFL students, recorded that 78% of respondents consider social media to be a more effective medium for developing conversational skills compared to classroom classes, and 83% noted that it was through social networks that they first encountered slang and idiomatic expressions that were not present in any course learning material. At the same time, only 40% of respondents used platforms for a conscious language purpose, the rest acted spontaneously, which again brings back to the central pedagogical question: not "whether to allow social networks", but "how to methodically organize their use so that spontaneous language contact turns into a controlled development of competence". Solomakha and Loboda (2021) confirm this thesis with Ukrainian data: among students of non-philological specialties, only 23% purposefully used social networks to improve a foreign language, while 77% did it randomly and unsystematically, and it is in this gap between the existing potential of platforms and the actual practice of their use that the main reserve for the methodological intervention of the teacher lies.

We have identified pedagogical conditions that form a hierarchical system, where each subsequent condition is a meaningful superstructure over the previous one. The absence of any of them not only reduces the effectiveness of learning, but fundamentally changes its nature: educational interaction turns into spontaneous consumption of content. Below is a detailed description of each condition.

The target orientation of knowledge is the basic condition, without which the remaining four lose their meaning. Its essence lies in the fact that the teacher, before involving any platform in the educational process, must clearly determine: which component of the ICC will develop a specific task. The Byram model (2020) distinguishes five such components: attitudes, knowledge, the ability to interpret, the ability to discover and interact, critical cultural awareness, and each of them requires fundamentally different forms of working with a digital resource. Watching a video blog forms sociolinguistic sensitivity, but does not develop critical awareness if it is not accompanied by an analytical task. Participation in a thematic discussion on Facebook develops the ability to interact, but does not form knowledge about the cultural context if the student does not receive the appropriate conceptual foundation. That is why the target orientation implies not just the "purpose of the lesson" in the traditional sense, but the exact binding of the task to the descriptor of competence, which the teacher carries out at the stage of course design, and not at the time of the lesson.

Table 1. Matching of ICC components and types of tasks in social media

Component of the ICC (Byram, 2020)	Task type	Recommended platform
Attitudes (openness, curiosity)	View authentic content by native speakers, comment on cultural differences	TikTok, YouTube, Instagram
Knowledge (socio-cultural practices)	Analysis of culturally labeled texts, videos, news	YouTube, Facebook, Twitter/X

Ability to interpret and establish connections	Comparative analysis of the presentation of one event in different cultural media	Facebook, Twitter/X, YouTube
Ability to discover new things and interact	Direct communication with native speakers, participation in thematic communities	WhatsApp, HelloTalk, Facebook groups
Critical cultural awareness	Reflective essay, video diary, group analysis of cultural stereotypes	Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp

The authenticity of the material is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for its pedagogical value. Any social media content is authentic in the sense that it is created by cultural bearers for cultural bearers, but not all authentic material is methodically suitable for a particular learning situation. The selection of content should take into account at least four parameters: the language level of the audience, the cultural sensitivity of the topic, the genre specifics of the platform, and the relevance of the material to the specific component of the ICC that is developing at this stage of the course. For levels A2-B1, short video formats with clear cultural labeling are optimal — household vlogs, short interviews, cultural comparisons in TikTok format. For levels B2–C1, a space of analytical materials opens up: editorials, podcasts, thematic discussions in Facebook groups, where the language is lively, complex, and contextually rich (Dubinina et al., 2025).

The importance of reflective accompaniment should be emphasized separately. Moreno Celeghin (2024) showed that micro-activities on WhatsApp are most effective precisely when accompanied by structured reflection: students not only perform communicative tasks, but also become aware of their own cultural reactions and rethink interaction strategies. A similar conclusion is defended by a research team that studied the development of ICC in philology students: the systematic involvement of digital authentic resources gives the highest effect in combination with activity-based forms of learning and organized reflection (Maloivan & Dyrda, 2025).

Reflective support is a condition that fundamentally distinguishes the pedagogically organized use of social media from the usual viewing of content. Without reflection, a student can spend an hour watching a video blog of a native speaker and learn a set of cultural stereotypes instead of cultural understanding, because spontaneous consumption of content confirms existing prejudices, not overcomes them. Reflective accompaniment involves structured tasks before, during, and after contact with authentic material: formulating one's own cultural expectations before viewing, capturing moments of surprise or misunderstanding in the process, analytical comprehension of cultural differences after completion.

Table 2. Forms of reflective support at different stages of working with social media content

Stage	**Form of reflection**	**Purpose**	**Example of a task**
Before contact with the material	Activating cultural expectations	Identifying existing stereotypes	"What do you expect to see in a video about everyday life in Japan?"

While browsing	Capturing moments of surprise	Development of cultural observation	"Mark three points that surprised you or seemed incomprehensible"
After viewing	Analytical Reflection	Formation of critical cultural awareness	"What explains what surprised you? Compare with similar practices in your culture"
A week later	Delayed reflection	Consolidation and generalization	"Has your perception of this cultural practice changed? Why?"

The next condition concerns the principle of methodical design of educational tasks: they must correspond to those digital practices that the student already implements every day, and not require fundamentally new forms of behavior in an unfamiliar environment. A student who posts Instagram stories every day will naturally complete the task of "write a story in a foreign language about the cultural difference you noticed today." A student who reads the TikTok feed every day will organically join the task of "find three videos where native speakers react differently to the same situation and explain why." Instead, tasks that require registration on unfamiliar platforms or mastering new digital tools waste the student's cognitive resource on technical mastery instead of cultural reflection (Solomakha & Loboda, 2021; Riabchun & Melnyk, 2024). The principle of focusing on real practices also means that the teacher must know which platforms his specific audience uses, and this requires a systematic diagnosis of students' digital habits at the beginning of each course.

The fifth condition is system-forming in the sense that in its absence, the remaining four conditions are implemented only declaratively. A teacher who does not understand the functional logic of platforms is not able to correctly select content, design a reflective task, or assess the quality of intercultural interaction of students in the digital environment. Kryvonos (2024) emphasizes that a teacher's digital competence encompasses not only the technical ability to use platforms, but also an understanding of their culture, genre norms, and communicative conventions. Each platform has its own internal communication logic, its own codes, and expectations. A teacher who does not know that a comment on YouTube and a message on WhatsApp are subject to fundamentally different norms of communicative behavior will not be able to teach a student to navigate these differences. The development of the digital competence of the teacher is, therefore, not a technical issue, but a pedagogical priority, and should be systematically included in the programs of advanced training of pedagogical personnel.

The issue of motivation is also important. Researchers unanimously state that students willingly complete tasks on social networks when they correspond to their real communication practices – writing posts in a foreign language, recording video stories, blogging about their own progress, creating individual or network projects (Solomakha & Loboda, 2021). At the same time, the transformation of teaching thinking remains the main pedagogical condition: most teachers formed within the traditional system gravitate towards a verbal-abstract style of material introduction, while students of the Digital Natives generation naturally expect multimodal and interactive learning.

Among the modern forms of pedagogically organized use of digital platforms, a special place is occupied by telecollaboration and virtual exchange (VE). Both formats provide for systematic joint activities of participants from different countries by means of digital technologies, where the key goal is not just language practice, but real intercultural interaction. VE turns out to be a flexible model that allows you to form skills in adapting speech behavior, intercultural sensitivity and strategies

for overcoming communicative misunderstandings through tasks for cooperation and reflection. Participants in such exchanges learn how to agree on meanings, overcome communication barriers, and comprehend their own strategies, and this is the qualitative difference between VE and passive content consumption.

A valuable example of an integrative approach to the formation of ICC by means of digital technologies is demonstrated by the project "Ukrainian as a Foreign Language without Borders", implemented by Sumy State Pedagogical University named after A. S. Makarenko and Istanbul University (Turkey). Semenoh and Kushnir (2025) describe the method of "communicative connection", which transforms the educational process into continuous intercultural communication through the involvement of authentic video materials, linguocultural commentary, picture dictionaries, and joint online activities. The method demonstrated the ability to organically combine linguistic and cultural knowledge even in the conditions of physical isolation of students from the natural language environment, which is especially significant for the Ukrainian wartime context. The activities of the Ukrainian Cultural Club in Istanbul and the participation of foreign students in international competitions testified to the positive dynamics of the development of intercultural linguistic personality.

An equally important condition is the digital competence of the teacher himself. Kryvonos (2024) emphasizes that the successful digitalization of the educational process depends on the level of readiness of the teacher, because only those who have achieved a sufficient level of digital competence are able to methodically competently manage learning in the digital environment. Studies have confirmed: students are often inclined to consider any message on a social network as "educational interaction", while from a methodological point of view, not every such activity meets the criteria of purposeful educational activity. It is this discrepancy between "use" and "learning" that outlines the zone of professional responsibility of a modern teacher-innovator.

No single social platform is a universal tool for the formation of ICC: YouTube is the most effective for developing listening and sociolinguistic sensitivity, WhatsApp and messengers are the most effective for developing skills for informal intercultural interaction in real time, while TikTok and Instagram provide contact with culturally labeled microgenres and current trends of the target culture (Madani, 2023; Zhu, 2025; Moreno Celeghin, 2024). Accordingly, the choice of platform should be determined not by the student's habits, but by a specific component of the ICC, which is a priority at a certain stage of learning.

The basic condition for the effective use of social media in language teaching is the target orientation: without a clearly formulated didactic goal, any platform remains an entertainment environment. The superstructure above it is a methodically verified selection of content, taking into account the level of language training and cultural sensitivity of the audience, especially critical at the initial levels, where inappropriate material can demotivate the student to any further contact with the target culture. Reflective accompaniment transforms a separate learning experience into a systematic development of intercultural thinking, and a task such as "watch the video" without further analysis of cultural meanings remains methodically inferior (Maloivan & Dyrda, 2025; Kurasova et al., 2026).

The analysis also provides a practical conclusion on the design of training courses. The most productive is not episodic, but systematic integration of platforms into the course structure with reference to specific ICC descriptors, criteria for evaluating cultural reflection and mandatory feedback from the teacher. It is this model, in contrast to spontaneous use, that provides a measurable development of competence, and not just a subjective feeling of "contact with language". The proposed system of pedagogical conditions can be used in the design of foreign language courses for various specialties — both philological and non-philological — as well as in

teacher training programs, where the development of the teacher's digital competence is no less important than the student's mastery of language skills (Kryvonos, 2024; Dolozhevska & Martyniuk, 2025). A student who spends three hours a day on social networks without a methodological framework assimilates cultural stereotypes, not cultural understanding, he consumes the surface of someone else's culture without immersing himself in its logic. That is why the role of the teacher in the digital learning environment does not decrease, but qualitatively changes: from a knowledge carrier to an architect of experience capable of transforming spontaneous digital contact into a controlled process of ICC formation (Kurasova et al., 2026; Kryvonos, 2024).

5. Discussion

Returning to the purpose of the study, the results obtained generally confirm the initial hypothesis, but with a fundamental caveat: social media is pedagogically expedient not by itself, but only if it is used methodically in an organized way. The scale of coverage by platforms of the world's population is 5.66 billion active users, 68.7% of humanity (Kemp, 2025), which indicates that the question is no longer in the plane of "is it worth using", but only in the plane of "how exactly to use correctly". An educational system that ignores an environment where an applicant spends more than 18 hours a week (Sheikh, 2026) is abandoning the largest informal learning space in human history.

The results obtained are consistent with the data of international studies, but they also reveal important discrepancies. In particular, the conclusion that an automatic presence on social networks does not ensure the development of the ICC is supported by data from Maharani et al. (2025): students with a lower level of cultural awareness used the platforms exclusively for entertainment, not noticing their educational potential. At the same time, research by Zhu (2025) and Madani (2023) demonstrates that when there is a clear educational goal, the same platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram become a medium of deep cultural immersion. Such a contradiction between "use" and "learning" is perhaps the central problem of the entire discourse on digital language learning, and the proposed study confirms that it is solved not by choosing the right platform, but by the quality of pedagogical design.

It is significant that the data of Ukrainian studies (Solomakha & Loboda, 2021; Dolozhevska & Martyniuk, 2025) are fully consistent with international ones: most applicants spontaneously use social networks for entertainment, not for learning, and the transformation of this pattern requires not prohibitions and restrictions, but a methodological restructuring, that is, a shift from "banning the phone in class" to "designing the task for the student's real digital practices". This is also consistent with the findings of Buchatska and Synorub (2026), which showed that authentic video materials form sociocultural sensitivity when they are organically embedded in the didactic system, and not just shown as an illustration.

At the same time, the study has a number of limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results. The analytical review relies mainly on research carried out in the university context; School and corporate language education remain underrepresented. In addition, the vast majority of the works reviewed focus on English as the target language, while the potential of social media for learning French, German, Spanish, and other languages requires separate research, as indicated in particular by the work of Mykhalchuk (2025) on French. Finally, most studies record short-term effects; the question of the stability of the formed competencies over time remains open.

6. Conclusions

The study made it possible to establish specific patterns that have not yet been consolidated into a single pedagogical system. It has been proved that different social platforms have fundamentally different didactic potential:

YouTube forms sociolinguistic sensitivity and the ability to distinguish culturally marked statements; messengers provide authentic informal intercultural interaction in real time; TikTok and Instagram give access to live cultural microgenres unattainable in a textbook format. A hierarchical system of five pedagogical conditions for the effective use of platforms has been proposed and substantiated: target orientation of tasks, methodically verified selection of content, reflective support, orientation to real communicative practices of students and digital competence of the teacher, where each subsequent condition is a superstructure over the previous one, and not an equal element of the list. Thirdly, a pedagogical paradox has been recorded: high digital engagement of students without a methodological framework does not develop, but preserves cultural stereotypes, which radically changes the understanding of the role of the teacher from a translator of knowledge to an architect of intercultural experience.

The practical significance of the proposed system of pedagogical conditions lies in the fact that it is suitable for direct application in the design of foreign language courses for any specialties, as well as in teacher training programs. In Ukrainian wartime conditions, when the physical mobility of students is sharply limited, and the digital space remains the only available platform for authentic intercultural interaction, the practical value of these results becomes especially acute. The novelty of the study lies not in the description of individual platforms, but in the fact that for the first time the principle of correspondence between the type of platform and the specific component of the ICC, which it is able to develop most effectively, has been substantiated.

Prospects for further research are seen in the study of the long-term effects of pedagogically organized use of social platforms, to what extent the acquired intercultural competencies are preserved after the completion of the course and how they are transformed in real professional communication. The direction is to expand the subject of research to languages less represented in digital educational discourse, French, Spanish, languages of Asian countries, where the specifics of digital cultural practices differ significantly from the English-speaking context. The question of the near future remains the role of artificial intelligence in intercultural learning: are Artificial Intelligence tools built into social platforms capable not only of translating words, but also of forming cultural understanding, and if so, under what pedagogical conditions and with what participation of a live teacher.

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8. Author Declaration

The authors confirm that this manuscript is an original work, has not been previously published, and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. All sources, ideas, and materials used in the preparation of this article have been appropriately cited in accordance with academic standards.

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise, that could have influenced the research design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, or the presentation of the findings.