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Study 3

Interethnic Contact Online: Contextualising the Implications of Social Media Use by Second-Generation Migrant Youth

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ABSTRACT

Some studies suggest that social media encourage interethnic contact by removing social and spatial boundaries between ethnic communities while offering new spaces for communication and redefinition of ethnic identities. Others contend that social media add an online dimension to intra-ethnic bonding, either within the ethnic community or transnationally. This paper aims to understand such mixed findings by contextualising under what circumstances social media facilitate bridging and bonding behaviours. We conducted 52 semi-structured interviews with second generation migrant youth in Rotterdam to inquire about their motivations and considerations concerning social media use. Results show that social media offer a new space for different orientations of interethnic contact. Interethnic contact as such is rarely deliberately pursued online but it is often constituted in venues organised around common interests. Engagement in intra-ethnic online communities is motivated by struggles with identity and lifestyle. Migrant youth's online and offline lives are very much integrated and online communication deals with very similar complexities as offline interactions.

Keywords: Social Media; Interethnic Contact; Intra-Ethnic contact; Second-Generation Migrant Youth; Online Ethnicity; Social Capital; Migration; Social Inclusion

1. INTRODUCTION

The debate on migrant integration tends to focus primarily on the social and spatial dimensions of inter- and intra-ethnic contact, such as spatial dispersion, mixed schools and interculturalisation. Yet, in contemporary society, social contacts are increasingly established and maintained online. Social media, characterized by user generated content and interaction (Boyd and Ellison2007), provide new opportunities for contact with various communities. They provide ethnic minorities with new ways to relate to their ethnic communities, to people in their country of origin and to other groups in their country of residence (Elias and Lemish 2009). Some scholars have argued that online communication has the potential to overcome spatial and social boundaries that are inherent to offline social contact (Ellison et al. 2007, Hampton et al. 2011). Empirical studies have found mixed results regarding the implications of social media for interethnic contact. Social media may foster interethnic contact by providing new social network infrastructures that give access to bridging social capital that waspreviouslyunattainable.Thiswouldempowerethnicminoritiesthroughexchange of information and resources on life in the country of residence and by providing a sphere in which they can negotiate their position in the multi-ethnic society (Amichai-Hamburger and McKenna 2006). As such, social media would facilitate integration of ethnic minorities in their host societies. Others contend that social media strengthen intra-ethnic contact and impede interethnic contact by connecting ethnic minorities to their countries of origin within socalled 'transnational communities' or facilitating virtual parallel lives in the host country. Komito and Bates (2009) even describe the latter as 'virtual ghetto's' or 'enclaves'. Instead of bridging social capital, social media would only be used for bonding social capital – solidifying migrants' marginalised position. Such varying and sometimes contradicting findings concerning the implications of social media use by ethnic minorities create a need to contextualise interethnic contact theory in today's digital age. In this paper, we explore the implications of the widespread use of social media among minorities for interethnic contact. While not engaging in the discussion about the consequences of interethnic contact for migrant integration, this study aims to gain a better understanding of the varying and sometimes contradicting research findings with regard to the uses of social media use for interethnic contact. We focus on the circumstances under which social media foster interethnic, intra-ethnic or transnational contact, by asking second-generation migrant youth to motivate their choices in social media use. To this aim, we have formulated the following research question: How can we understand the varying uses of social media for interethnic contact by second-generation migrant youth's motivations of social media use? In order to contextualise online interethnic contact, we conducted semi-structured interviews with second-generation migrant youth in the Dutch city of Rotterdam about their social media use. We explicate how social media use relates to their ethnic identity. In what follows, we

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first elaborate on the interethnic contact hypothesis and existing findings with regard to social media use by ethnic minorities. As will be shown, studies have raised very general conclusions that need contextualisation and theoretical interpretation. We use the sensitising concepts of social media affordances (Gibson 1979, Hutchby 2001) and inter- and intra-ethnic contact in order to evaluate under what circumstances migrant youth engage with different ethnic identities.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Interethnic Contact Theory in the Context of Social Media

Interethniccontactisgenerallyconsideredtobeanimportantprerequisiteformigrant integration. In the literature on contact theory that originates from social psychology (Allport 1954, Pettigrew 1998), two arguments can be distinguished that entail, respectively, socio-cultural and socioeconomic integration: the contact hypothesis and the isolation hypothesis. The contact hypothesis asserts that a lack of interethnic contact will enlarge socio-cultural differences between groups and will lead to ethnic polarisation or even conflicts. At the same time, it claims that acquaintance lessens prejudice and stereotypes of the other. Thus, it supports socio-cultural integration. A competing hypothesis in this regard is the conflict hypothesis that states that interethnic encounter leads to competition and conflict between different groups over resources or values (Coser 1956, Dovidio et al. 2005, Esses et al. 2011). The isolation hypothesis holds that ethnically segregated neighbourhoods are an obstacle for the socioeconomic integration of migrants in society (Park 1926, Lewis 1969, Wilson 1987). Ethnic minorities have a marginalised position in society because their social networks are primarily ethnic and their access to resources is limited (Massey and Denton 1993, Musterd 2005). Ethnic segregation hinders the existence of ethnic bridges – the informal ties between ethnic minorities and the majority population or other minority groups (Van der Laan Bouma – Doff 2007). It is argued that this leaves minorities in a disadvantaged position. Interethnic contact is therefore also a condition for socioeconomic integration. Social media reduce the importance of spatiality for interethnic communication by making 'communities without propinquity' possible (Van Doorn 1955, Webber 1963, Castells 1996, Wellman 2001). The internet has afforded this well before the emergence of social media during the 2000s, so this debate is not new. Yet social media have made online social networking more popular and for a majority of people it is now an integral part of everyday life. Social media can be conceptualised as internet applications in which user-participation, content-sharing and social networking in (semi-open) network infrastructures is central. This adheres to a necessary condition for interethnic contact according to Allport (1954): an equal status of participants. Therefore, social media seem particularly suited to facilitate contact between people who would

otherwise not have had the opportunity or inclination to meet. Social media users orga-nise themselves in a plurality of networks that are shaped non-hierarchically and are not bounded by geographical borders (Haythornthwaite 2005). Social media are not limited to social networking sites such as Facebook. Weblogs, forums and many other webspaces can also be considered as social media in the sense that they allow users to contribute and interact with each other. Social network sites are organised around personal networks and other social media such as forums, weblogs and YouTube channels are organised around interest groups (Boyd and Ellison 2007, p. 219). Social media applications are commercial products and their design partly determines their use. A social constructivist approach, however, allows us to see a variety of appropriations within these technological boundar-ies: such as the affordances of social media that emerge in relation to their social context (Gibson 1979, Hutchby 2001). Characteristic for social media is that they lay down an infrastructure of latent ties – ones that exist technically but have not yet been activated – and make weak ties more easily approachable (Hiller and Franz 2004, Ellison et al. 2007). Social media activity creates a continuous virtual co-presence of others and their social capital (Vitak and Ellison 2013). Users can selectively create communities based on interest or acquaintance rather than geography or social status (Haythornthwaite 2005, p. 140). These affordances are relevant with regard to interethnic contact theory. Social media may enable bonding as well as bridging social capital; either locally rooted or spanning geo-graphical distances. In the next section, we outline the divergent views found in scholarly discussions on the implications of social media use for interethnic contact.

Hypothesised Roles of Social Media for Ethnic Identification

As social networking and the allocation of resources in the network society increas-ingly take place in online networks, it is important to consider the online dimension of ethnic identification. The implications of social media for interethnic contact have been subject of scholarly debate in the field of migration and integration studies (Peeters and D'Haenens 2005, Van den Broek and De Haan 2006,D 'Haenens et al. 2007, Elias and Lemish 2009, Lin et al. 2011). Before we turn to the hypothesised roles of social media for ethnic identification, it is important to first offer a more elaborate theorisation of the main concepts of this research: ethnicity and interethnic contact. In this paper, ethnicity is conceptualised as a dimension of identification. Identity is constituted along multiple di-mensions of identification, such as gender or class. For second-generation migrant youth, having parents who were born for example in Morocco, this does not automatically mean that one's ethnicity is 'Moroccan'. Sometimes it is predominantly Berber, Arabic, African, Dutch or European. Also hybrid identification occurs: Moroccan-Dutch, Dutch-Moroccan or Moroccan-Rotterdam. Ethnic identification is socially constructed in daily interactions (see Parker and Song 2006, Mainsah 2011, Marotta 2011). For ethnic minorities – who are often confronted with questions about their ethnicity – this dimension of their identity

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can become more prominent than it is for members of the majority population. Sameness or Otherness in case of minorities is often framed along ethnic lines. For some, ethnic identification proves more prominent than for others. For example, some identify more strongly along religious lines.

We should be wary of essentialist ethnic categories operating in notions of inter-and intra-ethnic contact; as ethnicity is a part of one's identity that is constructed in daily interactions. What entails interethnic and intra-ethnic contacts is therefore dependent on someone's ethnic identification and should not be presupposed based on, for example, nationality. In some cases, nationality and ethnic identification correspond, in other cases, one's construction of ethnicity differs from their nationality. Inter- and interethnic contact is however a useful heuristic distinction that is often used in the literature on social media, social networking and social empowerment (AmichaiHamburger and McKenna 2006, Franz and Götzenbrucker 2012). We therefore chose to use the categories of interethnic and intra-ethnic contact as heuristic devices in this study as well to point at different modes of ethnic identification that are supported by social media use. Inter-ethnic communication denotes communication of migrants with other ethnic groups in the country of residence – including the native population. Intra-ethnic communication is communication within the ethnic community. A first strain of literature claims that social media remove spatial boundaries and thereby facilitate interethnic contact. Amichai-Hamburger and McKenna (2006, p. 838) conclude that the internet has great advantages for intergroup contact over traditional face-to-face communication. Hampton et al.(2011) conclude that the use of newmediacontributestopersonalnetworkdiversityandaccessto-socialcapitalthatis available through those networks. Lin et al.(2011) found that Facebook use is positively related to international students' online bridging capital and social adjustments. It is argued that ethnic minorities will establish online interethnic contact in their attempt to organise and facilitate their transition into society. Kahne et al.(2012) found that most youth visit online venues that expose them both to opinions that align to their own and to views that diverge from their own. Interethnic contacts and information helps ethnic minorities to make life choices and contribute to improving their position in the society of residence. Social media provide a secure environment for gradual social learning (Nedelcu 2012, pp. 1348–1349). Althoughethnicitydoesnothavetobedisclosedin onlineinteractions,studieshave shown that ethnicity remains a relevant factor (Nakamura 2002, Leung 2005, Marotta 2011). Some studies point out that youth use the social media to negotiate their identities (Valkenburg et al. 2005, De Leeuw and Rydin 2007, Elias and Lemish 2009). As migrant youth are embedded in multiple social contexts, they often struggle with discordedandsometimescontestingidentities.Viasocialmediause,ethnicmin oritiesare looking for compromises between different dimensions of their identity. They do this, for example by creating personal profiles on social network sites or keeping a diary on

a blog, or by exploring alternative identities in virtual gaming worlds or on online forums (Mainsah 2011, Franz and Götzenbrucker 2012). In online communities, migrant youth can reflect on their own opinions by comparing them to those of their peers. Parker and Song (2006) refer to the process of negotiating ethnic identities as 'reflexive racialisation'. Ethnic identities still matter but they are redefined rather than erased or strengthened by

Other scholars hypothesise that social media are primarily used by ethnic minorities to relate to their country of origin and their own ethnic group instead of for interethnic contact. For example, Komito and Bates (2009, p. 243) reach a remarkable conclusion with regard to social media use by labour migrants in Ireland: 'while these migrants may no longer live in physical ghettos, since they reside in dispersed locations in cities, they now live in "virtual" ghettos or enclaves, as they use new technologies to create separate lives within the wider society in which they work and live'. Social media are places where ethnic minorities can create their own communicative spaces and withdraw from society. Here, immigrants preserve their cultural heritage and strengthen the sense of intra-group solidarity within the ethnic community and broader diaspora. Rydin and Sjøberg (2010) argue that the internet has become a virtual substitute for migrants' homelands. Establishing intra-ethnic contact via social media adheres to the 'homophilia thesis' – also referred to as 'cyberbalkanisation' or 'echo chambers'–arguing that people will avoid being exposed to alternative opinions and meeting Others online (Sunstein, 2001, 2007, Pariser 2011). With regard to interethnic contact theory, this would mean that minorities do not use virtual spaces to expand their networks over ethnic bridges, but rather to reinforce their ethnic identity among like-minded peers. When the social context of the country of residence is estranging, social media provide possibilities for minorities to explore their ethnic belonging. The claim that intra-ethnic social media use by ethnic minorities would be problematic for integration is disputed. Some scholars point out that interethnic social media use can function as a source for social empowerment of minority groups (Elias and Lemish 2009). Ethnic homogeneous online venues can have empowering and emancipating consequences (Mehra et al. 2004). Parker and Song (2006) describe how online interaction has had offline consequences in the form of social gatherings, charitable donations and campaigns against adverse media representations. Intra-ethnic social media interactions can give a voice to ethnic minority groups, thus performing a central integrative function (Kissau 2012, Spaiser 2012). Social media that are intra-ethnic online, can thus lead to more interethnic interactions offline. These mixed findings and conclusions regarding the implications of social media use for interethnic contact indicate that social media might serve different constructions of different ethnic identities and that inter- and intra-ethnic contact is not mutually exclusive. This creates a need to contextualise under what circumstances social media support interethnic contact, under what circumstances they facilitate intra-ethnic contact and the theoretical mechanisms that account for these differing outcomes.

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3. METHODOLOGY

To study the implications of social media use for interethnic contact, this research focuses on (second-generation) migrant youth. We focus our study on this group because they generally are avid social media users – like comparable non-migrant age cohorts. The internet is, next to television and telephone, the most favourite technology for Dutch migrant youth, who are spending an increasing number of hours per day online and have access to internet via their PCs, laptops, tablets and/or smartphones (Van Summeren 2007). Next to this, it is particularly the youth who are exploring and establishing their position in society. It is asserted that this second-generation of immigrants is navigating between two ethnic identities: that of their country of origin and of their country of residence (Parker and Song 2006, p. 198, D'Haenens et al. 2007). Migrant youth need to find their way in the host society based on resources beyond the traditional authorities of parents and family as the latter did not grow up in the host society (Van Summeren 2007). A total of 52 qualitative interviews were held with second-generation migrants in the city of Rotterdam. We count as second-generation migrants those respondents that indicated to have at least one parent born outside The Netherlands. Recognising the socially constructed nature of ethnicity in everyday life and in cyberspace in particular, we had respondents define themselves in ethnic terms. The interviews did not depart from an essentialist notion of ethnicity but allowed respondents to outline different aspects of their (ethnic) identity online. Conclusions on second-generation migrant youth engaging in interethnic or intra-ethnic contact online, are based on respondents' own definitions of their ethnic identity that they brought forward in the interviews. This focus on second-generation migrants, sampled in the city of Rotterdam, does have implications for analytical generalisation based on this research. First, we can only draw inferences about second-generation migrant youth as this was our research population. The choice of this group is a consequence of social media use that is primarily popular amongst youth. Yet, we believe that findings regarding this population may have a broader meaning that, in the future, may apply to more age cohorts. The focus on the second-generation also speaks to the importance of this category in current integration debates, where especially in The Netherlands much attention has been attributed on the 'failure' of the second-generation to establish interethnic contacts. We sampled interviewees from Rotterdam because this city is one of the most ethnically diverse in The Netherlands and it has a relatively young population. Research does not pinpoint significant differences in socio-cultural orientation or socioeconomic position between second-generation migrant youth in Rotterdam when compared to another city like Amsterdam (Crul and Heering 2009). Yet there is no comparable research from smaller or less diverse cities – which may involve factors that could not be controlled in this research – available with which to compare. Additional research would be need to identify the impact of variables such as size of communities and 'density' of diversity on our inferences on the relation between social media use and interethnic

contact. Within these restrictions, we pursued a diverse sample in terms of gender, age and ethnicity (Table1). The interviews took place in the period from May to October 2012. Instead of recruiting respondents via social media, we chose to approach them in an offline setting. As a result, we were able to speak to a large variety of social media users as well as non-users, in order to be able to analyse differences in access to and use of social media (only one respondent reported to be a non-user). For this sampling, we visited different types and levels of local educational institutes and approached potential respondents for an interview. The interviews took place in appropriate places in the school where the interview could be conducted without anyone overhearing. Sometimes we interviewed two or three friends at once, whenever the respondents would prefer this. As the respondents who wanted to be interviewed together were friends, they were generally open in responding to our questions. The presence of friends however may have prevented some from disclosing socially undesirable information. Because we interviewed second-generation students, all respondents were proficient in Dutch and the interviews took place in Dutch. Before each interview, we ensured the respondents' anonymity. With permission of the respondents, the interviews were recorded and transcribed ad verbatim. Other interviews were transcribed based on notes of the interviewers directly after the interview. All interview transcripts were anonymised and stored separately from personal information. References in this paper cannot be traced back to individual respondents. The semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewees to elaborate on the interviewtopicsandanyotherrelevantexperiences. Ourinterviewtopicsandcodebookare informed by expectations from the literature on social media use and interethnic contact. We asked all respondents about the intensity of their internet use, the online sites and applications that they are using, what activities and topics they are exploring there and what purposes and effects this had according to them. We purposely asked our respondents about their internet use in general and not about social media use specifically because it cannot be assumed that our respondents have a similar understanding of what social media are. It proved difficult to ask respondents about some-thing as habitual as internet use. Respondents sometimes had difficulties remembering what activities they employ online and what online venues they visit. We solved this by asking about their daily life in general (school, work, hobby's, social contacts and interests) and then prompting whether the internet plays a role in this. We did not presuppose a certain ethnicity while asking respondents about inter- and intra-ethnic communication. The respondents' own definition of their ethnic identity was coded during the analysis. We conducted thematic content analysis of the interview transcripts using ATLAS. TI software. The main code-groups were entitled: (1) Intensity of social media use; (2) Type of media used; (3) Reasons/purposes of social media use; (4) Reasons for restricted use; (5) Strength of social ties; (6) Topics discussed online; and (7) Modes of communication(Interethnic/intra-ethnic). Viasubcodesandfurtherinterpretation and discussion of the data, we found several patterns in the data with regard to interethnic contact that will be described in the next section.

Table 1: Overview of basic characteristics of our sample:

Respondent №	Gender	Age	Parents' country/ countries of origin	Respondent №	Gender	Age	Parents' country/ countries of origin	Respondent №	Gender	Age	Parents' country/ countries of origin
1	v	21	Morocco	19	v	26	Antilles	37	v	22	Morocco
2	v	21	Suriname/Morocco	20	v	17	Turkey	38	m	26	Morocco
3	v	21	Suriname/Colombia	21	v	17	Morocco	39	v	21	Morocco
4	v	25	Suriname	22	m	23	Turkey	40	m	22	Morocco
5	v	24	Morocco	23	m	26	Suriname	41	m	24	Suriname
6	v	18	Morocco	24	m	25	Turkey	42	m	18	Suriname
7	v	21	Morocco	25	v	26	China	43	v	17	Morocco
8	v	21	Morocco	26	m	23	Afghanistan	44	v	18	Morocco
9	v	27	Morocco	27	m	21	Guinea	45	v	20	Morocco
10	v	18	Morocco	28	v	23	Morocco	46	v	16	Morocco
11	m	23	Morocco	29	v	23	Suriname	47	m	20	Cape Verde
12	v	23	Morocco	30	m	21	Suriname/Ghana	48	v	26	Morocco
13	v	25	Cape Verde	31	v	35	Colombia/Aruba	49	v	25	Morocco
14	v	17	Morocco	32	m	21	Morocco	50	m	24	Turkey
15	v	17	Morocco	33	v	23	China	51	m	23	Iran
16	v	18	Pakistan	34	m	29	Cape Verde	52	v	19	Suriname
17	v	25	Antilles	35	m	23	Cape Verde				
18	v	24	Antilles	36	m	27	Antilles				

4. RESULTS

In this section, we describe under what circumstances second-generation migrant youth are appropriating social media for inter- or intra-ethnic contact. Before we address social media use with regard to different modes of interethnic contact in subsequent subsection, we first provide some basic insights on the extent and ways in which our respondents are using social media.

Social Media Use by Second-Generation Migrant Youth

All second-generation migrants that we interviewed are internet users. The majority of our respondents uses internet in multiple settings (home, school, work, etc.) and on different technologies (PC, smartphone, tablet, etc.). Only one respondent indicated that he had no internet access at home but used it at school and friends or families house: 'I used internet quite a lot in the past but not anymore. At home we have no internet and now I am not in school any more I have to go to the library to go online' (Hindustan Surinamese male, 24). We did not find evidence for a digital divide based on internet access. On the contrary:

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most of our respondents are avid internet users. Due to the ease and frequency with which our respondents are using internet, they do not really distinguish between their online and offline activities. For many, going online to contact friends or look up information has become a habit and it plays a central role for all kinds of needs and purposes. Many prefer internet sources over traditional sources such as books, newspaper or television. All of our respondents are familiar with social media but they display different patterns of use. Most respondents named Facebook and Twitter as social media they were – or were not – using. Next to this, respondents mentioned using LinkedIn, Hyves (a Dutch social network site similar to Facebook) and online forums. These proved to be the most popular social media among our respondents. Our respondents vary in the types of social media they are using, their frequency of use and the way they are using social media(activelyorpassively). Incorrespondencewiththe90–9–1principle of participation inequality in online communities (Nielsen 2006, Brandtzæg and Heim 2011), the active users constitute the smallest group. This group of users is involved in (multiple) social networking sites and/or posts content on weblogs, forums or news sites. The group of passive users is what Nielsen(2006) in the typology defines as 'lurkers'. They regularly visit social media and read content but hardly ever contribute to it. This group constitutes the largest group in our sample. Within this group of passive users, we can distinguish respondents who know about social media but actively choose to use it as little as possible. They are for example not a member of social networking sites and rarely visit forums or weblogs. Their choice is based on either privacy concerns, disliking the banal characteristics of social media communication or a lack of time. The following statement of a Turkish respondent illustrates the concerns of passive users very well: I don't like Facebook and other social media. No-one calls each other anymore. Everyone is using Ping and Whatsapp. I think it diminishes mutual respect. You don't hear each other's voice and I find it very important to have real contact with my friends. Facebook messages are very superficial, pictures of people's lunch and such. Social media are for people who are alone and who are only focused on themselves. (Turkish male, 24)

Interethnic Contact

We found that social media use under certain circumstances indeed entails interethnic contact. When we asked our respondents whether they had used social media to meet new people (of their own ethnic group or other ethnicities) online, the answer was most of the times 'no'. In cases where new contacts were established, they were rarely continued offline. However, bridging (interethnic) contacts were established for instrumental reasons such as finding a job or seeking information. In these cases, some respondents did report using social media:

I am not looking for friends online. I don't visit sites where you can meet new people or something. No, that's not for me. For job applications I do establish contacts with people I didn't know before of course. But that is a different thing. (Turkish male,23)

With regard to interethnic contacts specifically, most of our respondents remarked that in case they would want to, social media provide opportunities to meet peers from other ethnic groups. They say it is up to themselves to decide whether to establish interethnic contacts online or not.

I think it is one of the purposes of social media to be able to meet new people, also Dutch people or Moroccan people. But if you do this or if you don't, depends on what you want. If you think, I want to stick to my Hindustan group of friends, you can. Many of my Hindustan friends do this on Facebook or Twitter – they only follow fellow-Hindustanis. It all depends on what you want to do with social media. (Hindustan Surinamese female, 23)

Such citations show that migrant youth are appropriating social media according to different needs that they may have. While interethnic contacts are hardly purposefully established, we encountered that interethnic contacts via social media often arise from common goals or interests. Respondents for example told us that they have discussions on forums about gaming or cooking.

I visit general news forums and forums about gaming. I play an online soccer game. There is a lot of different people on this forum, an international public even. (Iranian male, 23)

In such online venues, organised around interests rather than personal networks, inter-ethnic contacts are established unintentionally (Wellman 2001, Haythornthwaite 2005, p. 140, Boyd and Ellison 2008, p. 219). In these cases, ethnicity is not a relevant factor and often remains implicit. Even though online interethnic encounters are not actively sought, often remain implicit and are rarely continued offline, we found that online interethnic encounters can strengthen interethnic understanding and solidarity. Many respondents indicated that they like to read and discuss other people's opinion in social media venues where news and public opinions are discussed. For example, this respondent explains that she sees opinions of people with different (ethnic) backgrounds as enriching:

I like that on the forum you find people with different backgrounds. When you ask a ques-tion, you will get different answers. I think that it is interesting to know different viewpoints. (Moroccan female, 22)

Many of the respondents were interested in other people's opinions and ways of life and mentioned that it changed their image of the other.

> *[…]a big plus of such a forum is that you can find experiences and lifestories from a variety of people. Young, old, male, female, Moroccan, Turkish or Dutch, religious. What attracts me is the variety of opinions and experiences that you find on the forum. You can learn from others and their experiences. I try to do so, I take into consideration and I hope to learn from what I read there. (Moroccan female, 24)*

In such cases, social media support interethnic understanding. Even if interethnic contact is not purposefully sought for, it is sometimes established when actors from different groups seek similar information or interest online. It is not always the case that interethnic contact leads to more understanding and solidarity between groups. We encountered some evidence of online contact that involved interethnic tensions. This respondent for example describes how Dutch people sometimes visit a Moroccan-Dutch forum to express negative views of the Moroccan minority and provoke a fight ('flaming'):

> *OnMorocco.nl there are often Dutch people expressing themselves negatively about Moroccans. They visit Morocco.nl just to provoke. Sometimes I am inclined to think that all autochthonous Dutch people think this way, but that is not true. Then I need to put it in perspective that they are just these five people or so. (Moroccan-Surinamese female, 21)*

In such cases, interethnic encounters online may reiterate interethnic tensions that also exist in other settings. The online setting and intentions of the visitors thus explain whether and how interethnic contact is established.

Intra-ethnic Contact

Our interviews show that migrant youth are also reinforcing intra-ethnic bonding contacts online. Ethnic, cultural and religious background is sometimes one of the purposes or goals of social media activities of migrant youth. The following quote exemplifies how migrant youth purposefully search for one another in the online world:

> *I like to talk to fellow Moroccans online. I understand them. It is nice to read their opinions and experiences. Stories on Marokko.nl are recognizable. I think: oh, I experienced the same thing! You meet each other there. Even though you do not know the others, you have the same culture, the same norms and values. (Moroccan female, 17)*

Via the interviews, we encountered a number of different intra-ethnic forums, Facebook communities and other online venues. About half of our respondents indicate that they

use social media to establish or maintain intra-ethnic contact. As the Moroccan girl describes, many youth find recognisable stories from ethnic peers online. They learn how to deal with daily issues by comparing others' experiences and advice. This is particularly relevant in case of taboo subjects. For example, two respondents told us that they like to read forbidden love stories of others.

> *On Turkishplace.nl people write their love stories. It makes you very curious whether it will all end well. They are personal stories of what happened to people in real life. (Turkish female, 17)*

Another respondent mentioned a story entitled 'Yassin and I' and she described how boys would place calls on the forum Morocco.nl about girls they met and would like to get in contact with. Furthermore, ethnic use of social media keeps our respondents up to date with the latest news about the country of origin and the ethnic community in the Netherlands. For example, Antillean parties are announced, Ramadan experiences are exchanged and information and events regarding Surinamese 'keti-koti' are shared through social media. One respondent described how vacancies for jobs are published on Moroccan forums. As such, advantages of the ethnic labour market are maintained (Portes and Rumbaut 1990). There were also respondents that mentioned the added value of ethnic social media when living in a multi-ethnic society such as Rotterdam. As a Moroccan-Dutch girl explains:

> *We are already integrating, aren't we? We meet Dutch people everywhere. We live here in Rotterdam with nothing but other cultures. That is why it is good that Moroccans have their own spot on Marokko.nl. A place for ourselves. As Moroccans, you just understand each other. It is this we-feeling, a feeling of community. (Moroccan female, 17)*

Such statements of respondents would suggest that intra-ethnic bonding online is more relevant for people living in a multi-ethnic context. Other respondents however indicated that their ethnicity is more important for them in a less multiethnic setting. This respondent for example indicated that ethnic social media use became less important when she moved to Rotterdam:

> *At the time when I lived in Brabant I was discussing my Chinese background on the internet much more than now when living in Rotterdam. Rotterdam is very multicultural and therefore I do not feel the need to do so. In Brabant, I was the only Asian girl. I was surrounded by nothing but Dutch society. But now I live here I do not feel the need to go online for this because you meet other Asian people anyway. (Chinese female, 26)*

Underlying both citations is however the ability to discuss and inform themselves about their ethnic background offline. This is in accordance with Chen and Choi's (2011) finding that migrants with a high availability of offline (ethnic) social support, are less likely to seek online social support of co-ethnics. Another group of respondents mentioned that they avoid intra-ethnic social media use because they fear that it will hinder interethnic contact. For example, this Turkish respondent thinks that instead of retreating to intra-ethnic social media communities, it is important to learn how to engage with people from different backgrounds:

> *I am really against forums such as Hababam.nl or Marokko.nl where people will only meet people with a Turkish-Dutch or Moroccan-Dutch background. I think you need to learn to engage with different people. You need to be able to talk to people with different backgrounds. (Turkish male, 24)*

All in all, we found that ethnicity is only one amongst many topics that migrant youth discuss on social media, next to, for example, religion, sports or school. In some situations or life phases, when a respondent's ethnic identity becomes prominent, they engage in intra-ethnic online communities; and they can relate to co-ethnics in their country of residence. At the same time, many respondents still invest in transnational intra-ethnic contact, with friends and family in the origin country. Social media facilitate these kinds of contact, as the next citation shows:

> *It is very convenient to keep in contact with my family abroad through Facebook. When my aunt in Thailand posts something at four o'clock at night, we can read it the next morning. My brother just had a baby so everyone is curious to see what he looks like. Because of time differences Facebook is more convenient than telephone. Everyone answers when they can. Sometimes we use Skype as well. (Surinamese/ Colombian female, 21)*

Our respondents thus used social media to connect with family and friends in the country of origin, but they did not establish new transnational contacts through social media nor were they very interested in news and information about life in their (parents') countries of origin. They were primarily interested in general culture, traditions and religion. They indicated that in this, their transnational contacts and engagement is different than that of their parents who often read newspapers from the country of origin.

> *I don't often look for information about Morocco online. Only very general information about the region where my family originates from because we travel there regularly. I am not interested in what's happening in other parts of Morocco. (Moroccan male, 26)*

Intra-ethnic social media use of migrant youth does not often concern the homeland but rather their homeculture. They are interested in cultural and religious traditions from their country of origin but not so much in the daily news. The second-generation shows a more cosmopolitan outlook on their ethnic identity that goes beyond national categories (see, for example, Nedelcu 2012). Agglomerate identities such as 'Asian' or 'Islamic' were referred to. When using social media to read or discuss this, respondents preferred to interact with others from their ethnic community in the country of residence than with people from their country of origin. For our respondents, intra-ethnic contact on social media is not a retreat to a virtual representation of the homeland of their parents. Instead, they are engaging with other migrant youth in exploring their ethnic identity as one of many topics they are exploring on social media.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Prior studies have reached varying conclusions regarding the implications of social media use for interethnic contact. This is remarkable and urged us to contextualise these findings in an empirical study into the conditions under which social media contribute to differ-ent orientations of interethnic contact. We asked how varying uses of social media for inter ethnic contact can be understood. Our results show that interethnic and intra-ethnic contact in social media use results from the needs and motivations of the users. The type and purpose of social media use differs for youth and intra- and interethnic social media use is not mutually exclusive. While ethnicity remains a relevant factor online, not all social media use of migrant youth is ethnically oriented. Online communities of interest can result in unintended interethnic encounters. As Pettigrew (1998) posits, common goals are an important prerequisite for interethnic contact. Users selectively visit social media based on interests rather than prior acquaintance or (ethnic) background (Wellman 2001, Haythornthwaite 2005: 140, Boyd and Ellison 2007, p. 219). In some instances, ethnicity is the common interest that motivates and determines social media use. Many of our re-spondents valued intra-ethnic social media activities such as discussing cultural traditions on forums or hearing about upcoming ethnic events via social networking sites. Yet, in contrast to the intra-ethnic bonding thesis, the fear that ethnic minorities would retreat in virtual ethnic enclaves seems unfounded. Our research shows that migrant youth are using various types of social media and visit them for various purposes. Migrant youth visit certain social media venues when they have questions about their school or work, others when they want to discuss the latest soccer results and again others when they want to explore their own ethnic background. Speaking to the broader literature on interethnic contact and migrant integration, our study shows that social media has indeed become a relevant sphere for the study of interethnic contact, supporting different ethnic orienta-

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tions. Our analysis rejects the thesis that social media would only support intra-ethnic bonding (cf. Putnam 2000). By contacting respondents offline, and studying the broader range of their social media activities, we found that social media support both inter- and intra-ethnic contact. Interethnic contact was mostly established in interest-based online venues. Intra-ethnic online contact was established when the interest guiding migrant youth's online behaviour was their ethnic ethnicity. Studies sampling respondents through ethnic online communities (for example ethnic forums or Facebook groups) or looking at content of such media, risk overemphasising the scale and effects of intra-ethnic social media use. Furthermore, we found that bonding with migrant communities by second-generation migrant youth via social media is less oriented at the home-country than the homeculture; the transnational dimension of social media activities appears very limited. These findings add an important dimension to the current academic (and policy) debate on interethnic contact that often stresses the spatial (dispersal, gentrification) dimension rather than the virtual dimension. We should however avoid talking about online and offline life in binary terms. These lives are very much integrated and they co-construct notions of ethnicity and belonging (see, for example, Marotta 2011). Thus, it becomes clear that online communication deals with very similar complexities as offline interactions.

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