

Does contact online enhance direct line? - The potential of social media to promote immigrant integration

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Abstract

The current study analyzes whether cross-cultural communication in online social platforms between immigrants from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) and different sectors of veteran Israelis reduces social distances and facilitates immigrants' integration. The research objectives were: to examine whether online social contacts between immigrants and veterans correlate with social distances and to explore the direction of this correlation – whether online contact between immigrants and veterans positively affects the social distances between them according to the intergroup contact theory, or alternatively, that immigrants who feel closer to veterans tend to enter into online contacts with them, in keeping with the social homophily approach. The research was conducted through an online survey of 296 FSU immigrants that immigrated to Israel after 1989 and use social media sites in Hebrew. A double directional Amos statistical analysis was applied. The findings support the intergroup contact theory about the positive impact of online contacts on social distances toward groups with very different cultures and relatively small offline contact: Arabs and ultra-orthodox Jews. However, the social homophily theory was also supported by our findings: the social distances from Ashkenazim, Mizrahim, secular and religious Jews positively impact the frequency of online contacts with them.