

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

WEEK 9

Intercultural Communication in Media and Digital Spaces

Lecturer, Wayumba Iddah

Introduction

- ▶ This lesson examines how intercultural communication takes place through media and digital platforms.
- ▶ These spaces create opportunities for learning, dialogue, activism, education, entertainment, business and social connection
- ▶ They also create challenges such as stereotypes, misinformation, cultural misrepresentation, online hate, digital exclusion and cyberbullying.
- ▶ The lesson helps students understand how culture shapes the production, interpretation and sharing of media messages.
- ▶ It also explores how digital platforms influence identity, representation, power, participation and intercultural understanding.

Lesson Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students should be able to:

- ▶ Define intercultural communication in media and digital spaces.
- ▶ Explain how culture influences media production and interpretation.
- ▶ Discuss the role of digital media in connecting people across cultures.
- ▶ Analyse how stereotypes and cultural representations appear in media.
- ▶ Explain the challenges of intercultural communication in online spaces.
- ▶ Evaluate the role of social media in promoting intercultural dialogue.
- ▶ Suggest ways of communicating responsibly and respectfully in digital intercultural environments.

Meaning of Intercultural Communication in Media and Digital Spaces

- ▶ Intercultural communication in media and digital spaces refers to the exchange of messages, meanings, values, identities, and cultural experiences among people from different cultural backgrounds through mediated platforms.
- ▶ These platforms may include: Television, Radio, Newspapers and magazines, Films, documentaries and others.
- ▶ In these spaces, people encounter different languages, beliefs, lifestyles, symbols, values, and worldviews.

Why This Topic Is Important

- ▶ Intercultural communication in media and digital spaces is important because modern communication is increasingly global and digital.
- ▶ People now interact with individuals and communities from different cultures through: Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, X/Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and others
- ▶ Intercultural Communication is no longer limited to travel, migration or face-to-face contact.
- ▶ People can experience another culture through a film, news story, viral video, online debate or social media post.

Media as a Carrier of Culture

- ▶ Media does not simply transmit information. It also carries culture.
- ▶ Media communicates: Values, Beliefs, Norms, Ideologies
- ▶ Gender roles
- ▶ Social expectations
- ▶ Political views
- ▶ Religious meanings
- ▶ National identities
- ▶ Images of other cultures
- ▶ For example, a television drama may show how a particular society understands marriage, family, respect, leadership, gender or success.

Culture and Media Interpretation

- ▶ People from different cultures may interpret the same media message differently. This happens because audiences interpret messages based on their:
 - ▶ Cultural background
 - ▶ Religious beliefs
 - ▶ Language
 - ▶ Education
 - ▶ Political views
 - ▶ Social class
 - ▶ Gender
 - ▶ Historical experiences
 - ▶ Personal values

Representation of Culture in Media

Representation refers to how people, cultures, groups, and identities are portrayed in media.

- ▶ Media representation can be positive, negative, accurate, incomplete or stereotypical.

Examples of representation include:

- ▶ How African communities are portrayed in international news
- ▶ How women are portrayed in advertisements
- ▶ How religious groups are shown in films
- ▶ How rural communities are represented in development campaigns
- ▶ How youth are portrayed on social media
- ▶ How migrants and refugees are represented in news stories
- ▶ Good representation promotes dignity, fairness, diversity and understanding.

Stereotypes in Media

- ▶ A stereotype is a fixed and oversimplified idea about a group of people.
- ▶ Media stereotypes may appear in: Films, Cartoons, News reports, Comedy, Advertising, Social media memes, Political communication and Online comments
- ▶ Examples include portraying certain communities as violent, poor, backward, corrupt, emotional, primitive, lazy, or naturally talented in only one area.
- ▶ Stereotypes are dangerous because they reduce complex cultures into simple and often unfair images.

Media, Power and Cultural Dominance

- ▶ Media can reinforce power inequalities between cultures.
- ▶ Some cultures have more global media visibility than others.
- ▶ For example, Western media industries often have a strong global influence through films, music, news, fashion, and digital platforms.

This can lead to:

- ▶ Cultural dominance
- ▶ Marginalisation of smaller cultures
- ▶ Loss of indigenous languages
- ▶ Preference for foreign lifestyles
- ▶ Negative perceptions of local cultures
- ▶ Cultural imitation without critical reflection

Digital Spaces as Intercultural Meeting Points

Digital spaces bring people from different cultures together.

They allow people to:

- ▶ Share experiences
- ▶ Learn languages
- ▶ Build friendships
- ▶ Join international communities
- ▶ Participate in global debates
- ▶ Access global knowledge
- ▶ Promote cultural products
- ▶ Support social causes
- ▶ Challenge stereotypes

Opportunities Created by Digital Intercultural Communication

Digital platforms can promote intercultural understanding by enabling:

- ▶ Cross-cultural learning
- ▶ International collaboration
- ▶ Online education
- ▶ Digital storytelling
- ▶ Cultural exchange
- ▶ Peacebuilding campaigns
- ▶ Diaspora communication
- ▶ Global activism
- ▶ Interfaith dialogue
- ▶ Professional networking

Challenges of Intercultural Communication in Digital Spaces

- ▶ Despite the benefits, digital spaces also create challenges.
- ▶ These include: Misinterpretation of messages, Language barriers, Online hate speech, Cyberbullying, Cultural appropriation, Misinformation, Digital stereotypes, Racism and xenophobia, Religious intolerance and conflict escalation
- ▶ Online communication often lacks facial expressions, tone and physical context, making misunderstanding easier.

Language in Digital Intercultural Communication

- ▶ Language plays a major role in online intercultural interaction.

Language Challenges may include:

- ▶ Translation errors
- ▶ Misuse of slang
- ▶ Misunderstood humour
- ▶ Different meanings of emojis
- ▶ Code-switching
- ▶ Use of local idioms
- ▶ Dominance of global languages such as English
- ▶ Exclusion of minority languages
- ▶ For example, an emoji may appear friendly in one context but disrespectful in another.

Emojis, Memes and Symbols Across Cultures

Digital communication uses many symbols, including:

- ▶ Emojis
- ▶ GIFs
- ▶ Memes
- ▶ Stickers
- ▶ Hashtags
- ▶ Reaction buttons
- ▶ Images
- ▶ Short videos
- ▶ These symbols are not always interpreted the same way across cultures.

Social Media and Cultural Identity

- ▶ Social media allows people to express cultural identity.

People express identity through: Language choice

- ▶ Dress
- ▶ Food
- ▶ Music
- ▶ Religious posts
- ▶ Cultural celebrations
- ▶ Political opinions
- ▶ Family images
- ▶ Community events
- ▶ National symbols
- ▶ Hashtags and online campaigns

Online Identity and Self-Presentation

- ▶ In digital spaces, people choose how they want to present themselves.
- ▶ They may present themselves through:
 - ▶ Profile photos
 - ▶ Usernames
 - ▶ Bios
 - ▶ Posts
 - ▶ Comments
 - ▶ Videos
 - ▶ Shared content
 - ▶ Professional profiles

Digital Misunderstanding and Conflict

- ▶ Intercultural conflict can easily occur online because digital communication may lack context.
- ▶ Conflict may arise from:
 - ▶ Misread tone
 - ▶ Offensive jokes
 - ▶ Political disagreement
 - ▶ Religious comments
 - ▶ Cultural stereotypes
 - ▶ Misuse of images
 - ▶ Poor translation
 - ▶ Insensitive language
 - ▶ Assumptions about others

Online Hate Speech and Intercultural Conflict

- ▶ Hate speech refers to communication that attacks or discriminates against people based on identity.
- ▶ It may target people because of:
 - ▶ Ethnicity
 - ▶ Race
 - ▶ Religion
 - ▶ Nationality
 - ▶ Gender
 - ▶ Language
 - ▶ Culture
 - ▶ Migration status
- ▶ Online hate speech can damage relationships, spread fear, encourage violence and deepen cultural divisions.

Misinformation and Cultural Conflict

- ▶ Misinformation refers to false or inaccurate information shared, whether intentionally or unintentionally.
- ▶ In intercultural contexts, misinformation can:
 - ▶ Spread stereotypes
 - ▶ Fuel ethnic tension
 - ▶ Encourage religious hostility
 - ▶ Misrepresent cultural practices
 - ▶ Create fear of foreigners
 - ▶ Promote political manipulation
 - ▶ Damage trust between communities
- ▶ Students should learn to verify information before sharing it online.

Digital Divide and Intercultural Communication

- ▶ The digital divide refers to unequal access to digital technologies and internet services.
- ▶ Some people have better access to:
 - ▶ Internet connectivity
 - ▶ Smartphones
 - ▶ Computers
 - ▶ Digital literacy
 - ▶ Electricity
 - ▶ Online education
 - ▶ Digital platforms

Cultural Appropriation in Digital Spaces

Cultural appropriation occurs when elements of one culture are used by another group without respect, understanding, permission, or proper context.

- ▶ This may involve:
- ▶ Traditional dress
- ▶ Music
- ▶ Religious symbols
- ▶ Hairstyles
- ▶ Language
- ▶ Rituals
- ▶ Cultural designs
- ▶ Food
- ▶ Sacred objects

Cultural Appreciation versus Cultural Appropriation

- ▶ Cultural appreciation involves respectful learning, acknowledgement and engagement with another culture.
- ▶ Cultural appropriation involves taking cultural elements in a careless, exploitative or disrespectful way.
- ▶ Appreciation respects the source culture.
- ▶ Appropriation benefits from the culture while ignoring its meaning or people.
- ▶ Students should ask: Am I respecting the culture or am I using it for attention, profit or entertainment?

Social Media Activism and Intercultural Dialogue

Social media can support intercultural dialogue and justice.

- ▶ It allows people to:
- ▶ Challenge discrimination
- ▶ Share minority voices
- ▶ Mobilise support
- ▶ Raise awareness
- ▶ Build solidarity
- ▶ Document injustice
- ▶ Promote peace
- ▶ Create global conversations

Online Communities and Intercultural Learning

Online communities allow people with shared interests to interact across cultures.

Examples include:

- ▶ Academic forums
- ▶ Religious groups
- ▶ Gaming communities
- ▶ Professional networks
- ▶ Fan communities
- ▶ Language learning groups
- ▶ Diaspora groups
- ▶ Student exchange platforms
- ▶ These communities can build intercultural friendships and reduce prejudice when communication is respectful.

Intercultural Communication in Online Learning

Online learning brings together students and teachers from different cultural backgrounds.

- ▶ Intercultural issues may include:
- ▶ Different expectations of teacher authority
- ▶ Different levels of student participation
- ▶ Different attitudes toward deadlines
- ▶ Language challenges
- ▶ Different communication styles
- ▶ Different views on group work
- ▶ Unequal internet access
- ▶ Teachers and students need cultural sensitivity in virtual classrooms.

Intercultural Communication in Digital Journalism

- ▶ Digital journalism plays an important role in shaping how cultures understand each other.

Journalists should avoid:

- ▶ Stereotyping communities
- ▶ Using offensive images
- ▶ Ignoring local voices
- ▶ Generalising one person's behaviour to an entire culture
- ▶ Reporting without context
- ▶ Using colonial or discriminatory language
- ▶ Responsible journalism should promote accuracy, fairness, balance, and respect.

Guidelines for Ethical Intercultural Communication Online

Effective online intercultural communication requires:

- ▶ Respect for cultural differences
- ▶ Careful use of language
- ▶ Avoidance of stereotypes
- ▶ Verification of information
- ▶ Sensitivity to religious and cultural symbols
- ▶ Listening before judging
- ▶ Awareness of power differences
- ▶ Responsible sharing
- ▶ Avoidance of hate speech
- ▶ Willingness to apologise and learn

Key Skills for Intercultural Communication in Digital Spaces

Students should develop the following skills:

- ▶ Digital literacy
- ▶ Media literacy
- ▶ Cultural sensitivity
- ▶ Critical thinking
- ▶ Empathy
- ▶ Responsible posting
- ▶ Fact-checking
- ▶ Respectful disagreement
- ▶ Awareness of stereotypes
- ▶ Ability to interpret context
- ▶ Ethical sharing of cultural content

Lesson Summary

- ▶ Intercultural communication in media and digital spaces is central to modern life.
- ▶ Media platforms shape how people understand cultures, identities and global issues.
- ▶ Digital spaces create opportunities for intercultural learning, but they also increase the risk of misunderstanding, stereotyping, hate speech and misinformation.
- ▶ Responsible intercultural communication requires respect, awareness, ethical media use and critical thinking.

References

Intercultural communication: A contextual approach. Neuliep, J. W. (2020). (8th ed.). SAGE Publications

Intercultural communication Piller, I. (2025). (3rd ed.). Routledge. (Expected or upcoming edition; check for current release).

Intercultural communication: An advanced resource book for students (5th ed.). Holliday, A., Hyde, M., & Kullman, J. (2021). Routledge.

Thank You.

▶ The End