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**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**

**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

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**The Role Played by Social Media in the  
Migration-Related Decision-Making Process in  
the Case of International Students of Charles  
University**

*Master's thesis*

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## **Abstract**

The last decades have seen a growing number of international students. States and institutions all around the world are trying to attract students from abroad. Nowadays, to reach the target group they are putting information online. It is foreseeable since the Internet has deeply penetrated our daily life. However, there is still a lack of understanding of how aspiring international students use online sources, and how these sources influence their decision to study abroad. This thesis aims to provide up-to-date information on the influence of social media on the decision-making process of aspiring international students. This study was conducted with qualitative interviews with international students of Charles University.

After the data analysis, it became apparent that even though social media does not have a major impact on one's choice to study abroad, it is an important medium that helps one to maintain and create personal networks and disseminate people's influence. Therefore, one can conclude that social network sites facilitate student migration.

## **Keywords**

social media, international students, student migration, decision-making, aspiring students, student mobility

## **Abstrakt**

V posledních desetiletích roste počet zahraničních studentů. Země a instituce po celém světě se snaží přilákat studenty ze zahraničí. V dnešní době dávají informace online, aby oslovili cílovou skupinu. Je to předvídatelné, protože internet hluboce pronikl do našeho každodenního života. Stále však chybí pochopení toho, jak aspirující zahraniční studenti využívají online zdroje a jak tyto zdroje ovlivňují jejich rozhodnutí studovat v zahraničí. Cílem této práce je poskytnout aktuální informace o roli sociálních médií v rozhodovacím procesu začínajících zahraničních studentů. Tato studie byla provedena kvalitativními rozhovory se zahraničními studenty Univerzity Karlovy.

Po analýze dat se ukázalo, že i když sociální média nemají silný vliv na rozhodnutí studovat v zahraničí, jsou důležitým médiem, které pomáhá udržovat a vytvářet osobní sítě a šířit vliv lidí. Lze tedy konstatovat, že stránky sociálních sítí usnadňují migraci studentů.

## **Klíčová slova**


sociální média, zahraniční studenti, migrace studentů, rozhodování, aspirující studenti, mobilita studentů

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## Declaration of Authorship

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Seoul, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023

Alena Rodikova 

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## **Diploma Thesis Project**

*Name and surname of the student:* Alena Rodikova

*Expected title of the thesis:* The role played by social media in the migration-related decision-making process in the case of international students of Charles University.

*Keywords:* social media, international students, international migration, decision-making

*Thesis supervisor:* Annamária Neag, D. Phil

### **Topic of work**

In the 21st century, it is impossible to overlook the importance of the phenomenon of migration. Migration is a significant demographic phenomenon that drives both political and social change. It plays a crucial role in the development of society- consequently, it shapes human history. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the forces driving it. At this moment in time, social media sites are one of these forces, as “the social media speed up the process of network formation and migration. Migrants communicate with more modern internet technology” (Hidayati, 2017, p.516). Though “social media is not just a channel of communication in the network migration, but a virtual infrastructure, sync contacts, and relatively open to facilitate the migration properly” (Hidayati, 2017, p. 523). Social media platforms create new opportunities for migrants by fostering links in the country of destination, getting to know the place of destination before arrival, keeping in touch with those left behind in one's country of origin. Therefore, it is no surprise that there is an increasing interest in the research of social media's impact on migration. However, most of



the conducted studies focus on the role played by social media in the integration process of migrants. Moreover, if one talks about the international students' migration, it is necessary to point out that there is a “lack of understanding about how international students are using online sources for information” (Chang & Gomes, 2017, p.348). That is why this diploma thesis will seek to understand how social media influence one’s decision to leave his/her country of origin to undertake the study abroad. This work will provide an up-to-date data on the role played by social media in the case of international students. Furthermore, it is also expected that this diploma thesis will be capable of answering questions as to why students choose some social network sites over others, what kind of help these platforms provide to them, and whether social media influence one’s choice of university.

### **Assumed research methods**

For the upcoming research, it is planned to perform qualitative data analysis. To gather the necessary qualitative data, in-depth interviews will be conducted among international students of Charles University studying in Prague. The interviews will focus on participants’ personal experiences with social media sites. The respondents for the upcoming research are expected to be chosen by the snowball sampling method. Furthermore, to explore what kind of assistance social media provides to international students the content posted on the pages and groups for international students will be analysed.

### **Ethical context of the considered project**

Before conducting the interviews, the researcher will carefully plan the course of the interview. All the respondents will be provided with a written explanation of the subject and the flow of the interview. Furthermore, the researcher undertakes a responsibility to inform the participants of the research regarding the purposes of the study. Respondents will also

provide a written consent about participation in the study and will obtain the right to withdraw at any point of the research. Moreover, the names of the subjects of the interviews will be substituted with pseudonyms, if not asked otherwise. The data that will be collected will be stored separately from the personal files and protected by password. Once the need for information ends, the researcher will delete the collected data. The researcher undertakes the responsibility to conduct appropriate data analysis. To do so all the gathered data will be enclosed to the work. The methods of the analysis will also be thoroughly explained. No conflicts of interest are expected.

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## **I. Introduction**

Often, studying abroad is deemed as something prestigious, something to be proud of. Some families would proudly tell others that their kids/grandkids are studying outside of their home country. Often, studying abroad is perceived as "making it". This is all due to the belief that education, especially education received in a foreign country creates more opportunities for one's future, gives a chance to live a better life or gives a possibility for permanent migration. Nowadays, it is not uncommon to encounter international students, more and more people are choosing overseas education. With the development of technologies and means of communication risks of migration are reducing (Dekker & Engbersen, 2012). One does not have to sacrifice his/ her personal connections and relationships anymore. Thanks to the development of technologies and means of communication, people can get in touch with each other at any time, therefore, it is not surprising that interest in receiving education abroad keeps increasing.

However, despite the increasing interest and growing numbers of international students, there are some gaps in this area of research. Especially when it comes to less popular destination countries, such as the Czech Republic. In 2019, the most popular European countries among international students were the United Kingdom (the state was a member of the EU back in 2019), Germany and France (European Commission, 2022).

The Czech Republic is one of the state members of the European Union. In 2019, based on the level of safety this state was ranked 8th among all the countries in the world (World Population Review, n.d.). However, despite this fact as well as the growing attractiveness of attaining a degree in the Czech Republic and the comparative affordability of life in this European Union member, the Czech Republic is not a typical destination for international students. It is not a country that one would immediately think of when considering studying

abroad. When contemplating getting a degree outside of one's country of origin, he/she would usually first consider countries such as the USA, UK, or Australia. If one looks up the most popular destinations for international students, he/she will see that the top five countries for international students worldwide are the following: the USA, the UK, China, Canada, and Australia (STUDEE, n.d.). At the same time, the Czech Republic does not appear among the top 10 most popular destinations (STUDEE, n.d.).

Though one should not overlook the growing popularity of the Czech Republic, despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the number of international students enrolled in Czech universities grew from 46,351 in 2019 to 50,121 in 2020. The country has faced an increase of 8.1% in the number of students who are holders of foreign citizenship (Studyportals, 2021).

Among all universities in the Czech Republic, Charles University is one of the most well-known. Charles University was founded in 1348, therefore, it is the oldest university in Europe and one of the oldest universities in the world. It is the highest-rated university in the Czech Republic, and in 2021-2022 occupies the 233rd position at the top of the best institutions in the world (CWUR, n.d.). Charles University has nearly 50,000 students (which is almost one-sixth of all students in the country) and over 7,000 international students (Charles University, 2018). Languages of instruction in the university are English and Czech.

The study presented in the empirical part of this master thesis focuses on international students of Charles University. It aims to get a deeper understanding of the international students' decision-making process. Specifically, the role and impact of social media platforms. Because of the popularity of social networks sites, one might assume that it has some influence on aspiring students' choices. However, is this true? This master thesis aims to answer this question. Furthermore, two main questions will be answered in the empirical part of this work:

1. To what extent does social media influence one's decision to study abroad?
2. What is the most convenient platform for prospective students to find information about the university and destination country?

Besides that, before discussing the conducted study and answering the two main questions mentioned above, this master thesis will present a review of the literature on this topic.

In the first chapter, one will get familiar with the meaning of the terms "student migration", "push" and "pull" factors, "social media", "brain drain", and "brain circulation". Moreover, this chapter will give one a quick look into the history of international education and discuss already conducted studies on the topic of student migration. The second chapter will discuss methods used during the study for this master thesis, while the third chapter will present its results. The fourth chapter of this work is a discussion of the results of this research and its relevance to the previously conducted studies. This master thesis will end with a conclusion that will summarize the main points of this work.



## **1. Review of Literature.**

### **1.1 Phenomenon of Migration**

According to Lee (1966), “migration means life and progress” (Lee, 1966, p.49). Migration is a complex phenomenon, which stands for “permanent or semi-permanent change of residence”(Lee, 1966, p.49). However, not all movements of people can be called migration, this phenomenon describes the process of relocation from one place to another with the purpose of temporary or permanent settlement at the place of destination. There are different types of migration determined by the purpose of mobility. Depending on the purpose of mobility, migrants can be put into different categories such as family migrants, labour migrants, and international students. It is necessary to point out that there is a growing appeal for knowledge and skills among all groups of migrants, therefore migrants are urged to attain those before and after relocation (Raghuram, 2012). As previously mentioned, the duration of migration varies as well- it can be permanent or semi-permanent. Permanent migration describes a situation when an individual changes his/her place of residence without planning to come back to his/her original place of residence. Temporary migration, on the other hand, is limited by time, some examples of temporary migration are seasonal work and studies abroad (University of Bolton, 2021).

Furthermore, a change of residence might be voluntary and forced. Voluntary migration describes the situation when the migrant himself/herself decides where they go, when they leave and how long they are going to stay at the new place of residence. Often, voluntary migration is driven by potential economic benefits, on the other hand, forced migration depicts an occurrence when one doesn't have control over the circumstances (Bakewell, 2021). There are different examples of forced migration since it can be caused by the government's decision (deportation, entry ban) or by circumstances such as war, poverty, etc. According to Bakewell (2021), it can be hard to differentiate between voluntary and forced

migration movements since various factors that should be considered when determining the type of movement. In his work, Bakewell (2021) points out the necessity to find a balanced way of analyzing both types of migration: forced and voluntary due to the differences in stimulus to move as well as the patterns of movement. Bakewell (2021) stressed the necessity to pay closer attention to circumstances that might have urged voluntary migrants to move and to the decisions that were made by forced migrants. Overall, he urges researchers to listen to migrants more carefully and not to draw a sharp line between these two groups of migrants (Bakewell, 2021).

Migration gives one the possibility to explore personal and professional opportunities. It gives one a chance to receive both material and experiential gains (Condradson & Latham, 2005).

One of the types of migration is student migration, which can be defined as the movement of students with the aim of getting an education outside of their previous country of residence or country of origin. UNESCO gives the following definition of internationally mobile students: “individuals who have physically crossed an international border between two countries with the objective to participate in educational activities in the country of destination, where the country of destination of a given student is different from their country of origin” (UNESCO, n.d.). The duration of student mobility varies from person to person.

It is important to note the difference between the terms "student migration" and "student mobility". In their work, Alves and King (2022) stress the differences between these two phenomena. According to them, there are three factors differentiating these two phenomena: the aim of mobility, its length and the distance between one's home country and the country of destination. Alves and King (2022) state that student mobility can also be called "credit mobility" and usually describes student exchanges such as the Erasmus Program. After the end of the mobility, students return back to their home countries and continue their degree at

home university. Therefore, student mobility is shorter and lasts from one to two semesters. Furthermore, usually, one does not travel long distances but moves to a neighbouring country. Whereas, student migration describes the process of conducting a whole degree abroad, which consequently, takes longer periods. Lastly, student migration tends to describe movements across longer distances (Alves & King, 2022).

Additionally, Alves and King (2022) differentiate between the terms "international students" and "foreign students". They point out that the term "foreign students" is based on citizenship. While the notion of "international students" is based on the country of origin or prior residence" (Alves & King, 2022, p.181). Moreover, international students usually move from Global North, while foreign students move from Global South. Consequently, international students are perceived as a privileged group, whereas foreign students are discriminated against (Alves & King, 2022).

Since interviews included in the data analysis for this thesis were given by full-time students the term "student migration" is a better fit for the empirical part of this work. Furthermore, even though there are some students from neighbouring countries, the purpose and duration of their mobility also fit the term "student migration". However, to avoid confusion both of these terms will be used interchangeably, the reason behind this is that many of the existing studies use these terms as synonyms. Therefore, it might be confusing to differentiate between them in a work describing other research. Moreover, participants will be referred to as "international students" since not only their citizenship but also the place of their residence and country of origin differs from the current one.

It is necessary to point out that most students who have decided to receive a degree outside their home country have moved from a less developed to a highly developed state (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2021). This type of student movement is called vertical mobility. On the other hand, horizontal student mobility happens when one migrates to a

country with the same level of development as his/her country of origin (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2021).

Nowadays, the so-called globalization of international education takes place. This phenomenon is a result of economic, social and cultural changes. It describes the movement of educators, students and programmes across different countries (University of Bolton, 2021). Some of the benefits of globalization of international education are increasing transnational collaborations, increasing the quality of education, lower levels of racism and discrimination and dissemination of various cultures across the world (University of Bolton, 2021). However, despite the existence of this phenomenon and the increasing importance and prevalence of student migration, this type of migration remains the least researched and talked about type of migratory movement (Riano & Piguet, 2016).

## **1.2 Brief History of International Education**

The phenomenon of international education has existed long before modern times. This phenomenon can be traced back to the Buddhist centre of learning- Nalanda University, located in the current state of Bihar. This education centre was operating between the 5th and 13th centuries and was attracting students from various parts of Asia (Bass, 2019). During colonial times, Indian students were allowed to travel to the United Kingdom to acquire education there. Such practices were seen as an indicator of the wealth and prestige of the person who went abroad and the whole family (Bass, 2019). Another significant period in the dissemination of higher education was marked by the beginning of the geopolitical tension between the US and USSR- the Cold War. It took place between 1947 and 1991. During these years countries were competing to attract more international students to disseminate their ideology and worldview (Britannica, 2023). States were interested in training students from other countries, so later they could return home and spread what they have learned

abroad. In 1951, Colombo Plan was created to attract more international students, this was a program aimed at the development of the South-East Asian region. Colombo Plan provided students with financial and technological help for studying in developed countries such as Australia (Baas, 2019).

Nowadays, there are various programs that are aimed to attract international students. Today studying abroad is considered a gateway to achieving one's career goals. Therefore, more and more people consider receiving a degree overseas. Nowadays, international students are the fastest-growing group of migrants (Riano & Pigué, 2016). The number of students deciding to study abroad has been rapidly growing over the last two decades: if in 2000, there were 2 million internationally mobile students, in 2017, this number reached the mark of over 6 million students (Sabzalieva, Mutize & Yerovi, 2022).

### **1.3 Motivation to Study Abroad. Push and Pull Factors**

When talking about student migration and migration in general, one must talk about the push and pull factors model (Lee, 1966). According to Lee (1966), migration is a complex phenomenon, therefore, the decision to migrate is a significant step that is influenced by various factors. Such factors can be classified into two groups: push and pull factors. Push and pull factors within the country of origin and destination are what attracts one to settle down in a state or force him/her to move abroad. Pull factors stand for the factors that draw one to move to a new place. Examples of this can be higher wages, a better quality of life, and cheaper education. On the other hand, push factors pressure people to move, for instance, ongoing conflict, high levels of unemployment, and poor climate conditions. However, besides these two groups of factors, there are also intervening obstacles that influence one's decision to migrate. Intervening obstacles might prevent migration or complicate it, for example, poor transport connections or legal requirements (Lee, 1966). During one's

migration journey, one can be forced to turn back and return to his/her country of previous residence due to various reasons. Consequently, international migration is a complicated phenomenon that combines "personal motivations, economic prospects, geopolitical factors, and cultural transitions" (McGill, 2013, p.178).

Therefore, deciding to migrate and study abroad is not a spontaneous matter. It is a well-thought and analyzed decision, however, in the migration-related decision-making process, a portion of irrationality is present as well (Lee, 1966). Since some information received by an individual can be biased or limited, there is always a risk that some important data about the country of destination is missing. Therefore, the decision to migrate is always partly irrational. (Lee, 1966).

One's motivation to become an international student is influenced by various factors, such as socio-economic and cultural factors, environment and relationships have a great impact on one's decision to migrate or remain at home as well. Personal networks play a significant role in student migratory movements. This significance was demonstrated in Beech's study (2015) on international student mobility and the importance of social networks. In her work, she illustrates that social networks can influence one's decision to receive an education abroad. One's relationships might encourage him/her to become or discourage from becoming an international student. They might determine whether mobility will take place (Beech, 2015). Previously, the significance of personal networks was also demonstrated by Conradson and Latham (2005) in their study of migrants from New Zealand in London. In their study, they came to the conclusion that in the case of the participants of their study, friendship networks played a key role in assisting and supporting migratory movements (Conradson & Latham, 2005).

One should clarify here why more and more people choose to study abroad. Overall, a decision to migrate derives from a set of various motivations, which are not only represented

by financial considerations (Conradson & Latham, 2005). In this regard, the decision to receive a degree abroad is not an exemption. Hovdhaugen and Weirs-Jenssen (2021) in their study of Norwegian students' motivations to receive a full degree abroad, highlighted three dimensions of such motivations (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2021). The first dimension is Exploration. According to Hovdhaugen and Weirs-Jenssen, this is the most common dimension which includes pull motives associated with cultural and not education-related values. Some of the motivations related to this dimension are a wish to experience a different culture, the possibility of travelling, and the interest in studying abroad (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2021). The second dimension of motivation is Differentiation. It includes push and pull motives which are aimed to make one stand out (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2021). Many international students consider overseas education as an investment in their future since an "appeal for internationally-educated professionals increased in the last thirty years" (McGill, 2013, p.167). Experience of being an international student allows one to develop salient skills such as communication and intercultural communication skills, cross-cultural and critical thinking, and time management. Being an international student gives one an opportunity to improve one's language ability. Moreover, studying abroad provides one with an opportunity to make connections in the professional and academic spheres, increasing the chances to be admitted for further studies or finding a job or an internship after graduation. Sometimes, studying abroad is perceived as an opportunity to receive a "better" degree since some countries' education systems struggle with corruption and limited financial sources. Another reason for receiving education abroad is the unavailability of a specific degree in one's home country. Not to mention that studying abroad can be seen as a gateway for permanent migration since countries interested in attracting more international students have simplified the process of obtaining a residence for the graduates of local universities (Baas, 2019). In some states, international students are perceived as potential long-term

migrants (Baas, 2019). Therefore, being an international student is seen as an economic opportunity that in the future will allow one to be valued more by the employers and to receive a higher salary. Studying overseas helps one to stand out from those who received a degree in their country of origin. The last dimension of motivations highlighted by E. Hovdhaugen and J. Weirs-Jenssen (2021) is Pragmatism. The pragmatism dimension is mostly presented by push motives. Examples of motivations for studying abroad included in this dimension are not being able to enter a domestic university and better scholarship opportunities in a foreign country (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2021).

#### **1.4 How Universities and Governments Benefit from Student Migration**

Student mobility can be beneficial not only for international students themselves but also for the hosting universities and governments. When it comes to governments and universities, both get profit from the tuition fees that are paid by the students. Moreover, on the state level, international students are a great “way of addressing skill shortages in key areas ” (Gribble, 2008, p.26). Governments all around the world create new programs of migration to attract as many international students as possible. Especially when it comes to the professions that are not in demand among the local population. Additionally, foreign students are benefiting economies by rising demand for the goods and services in the country where they are acquiring knowledge. On a more local level, a decrease in the number of international students might result not only in the universities losing money but also in local economies suffering due to the decline in the numbers of part-time workers and rent payers (Baas, 2019).

#### **1.5 Phenomena of “Brain Drain” and “Brain Circulation”**

Student migration is often associated with the terms “brain circulation” and “brain drain”. The latter describes the phenomenon of losing qualified and highly skilled professionals by



country, which negatively impacts state's economy. Therefore, it is in the government's interests to keep qualified workers in the country and to attract new skilled migrants, as well as international students who will hold the necessary professional qualifications after graduation. The phenomenon of "brain drain" leads to the shortage of skilled employees in the sending countries and might overpower the positive influence of student migration such as "strengthening of cultural and commercial ties, transfer of technologies" (OECD, 2013, p. 32).

Consequently, the "brain circulation" phenomenon exists, which stands for the movement of highly proficient individuals. Part of the student migration is temporary: instead of settling down in the country of destination, qualified workers might decide to return home. Such a process when individuals temporarily migrate abroad to receive qualifications and increase their knowledge and skills, and come back to their country of origin is called "brain drain" (Gribble, 2008). After obtaining the necessary qualifications, those temporary migrants return to their country of origin, they might return permanently or temporarily. In the case of "brain circulation", not countries of destination but sending countries benefit from the migratory movement of qualified individuals (European Commission., n.d.). For "brain circulation" to exist, governments create various scholarship programs. Often, the government sponsors one's studies abroad on the terms that he/she must come back to the country and work there for a fixed number of years. Therefore, individuals also benefit from these programs by studying abroad for free and having a secured job position after returning home.

### **1.6 Importance of Digital Media and Social Media in Student Movements**

Today, governments and institutions around the globe use digital media as a tool for communication with international students (Chang & Gomes, 2017). They also rely on social media when it comes to recruiting new students. Undoubtedly, social network sites have

become an important medium when it comes to the dissemination of any kind of information, therefore, it is hard to underestimate the importance of these platforms when it comes to migration and student mobility. Social media is a complex phenomenon, so many definitions of it exist (Carr, 2015). In this work, social media is referred to as platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Pinterest. In other words, mediums that allow their users to generate and spread content and engage in personal networking (Hidayati, 2017).

Social network sites allow one to keep in touch and maintain existing relationships with those who are left behind in one's country of origin. Keeping in touch with family and friends helps one to better adjust to new environments since it creates "virtual home-based support networks" (Gomes, Berry, Alzougool & Chang, 2014, p.13). Such networks provide one with the necessary support and motivate him/her to make new connections.

Furthermore, social networks also provide one with an opportunity to make connections in the country of destination before his/her arrival there. There are various groups on social media that were created specifically for international students where one can ask questions and have a conversation with other aspiring or already enrolled students. Moreover, there are not only groups for international students but also groups based on age, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Therefore, one can easily find like-minded people beforehand. Being a member of such a group can help one to receive updates about the events and occurrences that are happening nearby. It is also a great way to meet new people while staying within one's comfort zone since one will be surrounded by people who share some similarities. Based on this, social media helps one to create a connection with the country of destination and to resolve one's anxiety related to moving abroad (Hidayati, 2017). Besides that, social network sites allow one to learn as much information about the country of destination as needed. Information on any topic can be found online. It can be anything from legal advice to advice

on where to go to buy the cheapest groceries. Therefore, one can decide whether the country and the university are worthy of moving based on the experience of others. Dekker and Engbersen (2012) stated that social network sites help one to get insider knowledge. In case one is still missing some information after doing his/her online research, he/she can always contact a university or some legal advice organization.

Furthermore, when talking about social media one has to mention the term “translocal” discussed by Martin & Rizvi (2014). This term is related to digital media and describes a situation when one is physically being abroad, but digitally being in the country of origin. This phenomenon occurs when one keeps using familiar online sources even after moving abroad (Martin and Rizvi, 2014). Based on this, one can see that the Internet and social media provide one with various sources of information and opportunities. However, there is also an obvious disadvantage to the development of and heavy reliance on digital media. According to Chang and Gomes (2017), digital media can have a negative impact on students’ integration into a new society. Phenomena such as the Internet and social media can lead to one living in a bubble (Chang & Gomes, 2017). Nowadays one can easily find communities representing his/her nationality. Often, it is easier to communicate with people who relate to you and speak the same language as you. Therefore, being a part of these communities can seem like an easier option compared to making new international friends who speak other languages than you.

Taking into consideration what was written above, despite the existing downside of social network sites, one can see that they speed up the process of migration by reducing the costs and risks associated with it. Its significance should not be overlooked: “Social media is not just a channel of communication in the network migration, but a virtual infrastructure, sync contacts, and relatively open to facilitate the migration properly” (Hidayati, 2017, p.523).

Therefore, no wonder that institutions are putting more and more information online in an attempt to reach out to as many prospective students as possible. Universities often prefer to invest in advertising campaigns that will be held on social media. Since the costs of such campaigns are low and the outreach of the online platforms is high (LYFE Marketing, n.d.). For example, according to some sources, the cost of reaching one thousand people via radio is 10\$ and a magazine is 16\$, and social media advertising costs only 2.50\$ (LYFE Marketing, n.d).

Though, despite the importance and the outreach of social media little research has been done on the topic of how social media facilitates student migration. The greatest part of the conducted research focuses on the role played by social networks once in the country of destination. Little attention is played to the role played by social media in the migration-related decision-making processes in the case of prospective students, especially when it comes to international students in Europe (Mardar, 2014).

### **1.7 Previous Research on International Students**

There were several studies aiming to understand the role of social media in decision-making processes in the case of international students. One of these studies was published in 2017 by Inayah Hidayati. During her research, Hidayati (2017) conducted 15 in-depth interviews with students from Indonesia with various faculty backgrounds. The main goal of this research was to identify how international students used social network sites, especially Facebook when they decided to study abroad.

During her study, Hidayati (2017) found out that for the respondents of her study information found online played a significant role in the decision of studying abroad (Hidayati, 2017). Students were accessing various information via social media platforms- from information about the university to information about daily life in Groningen. This research proved the

importance of social network sites in the process of maintaining and creating personal connections with the people living in the country of destination. When searching for information, respondents of this study relied on different sources on Facebook. While some were turning to posts from friends and relatives, others were browsing the university's page and various groups for international students. In her paper, Hidayati (2017) emphasized the importance of social media platforms by stating that social media helps migrants to establish and maintain a connection with their country of destination and their country of origin (Hidayati, 2017).

Overall, research held by Inayah Hidayati (2017) highlights the significance of social network platforms when it comes to migration-related decisions. Participants of Hidayati's research (2017) highlighted the significance of their friends' posts on social media. Respondents shared that they were greatly influenced by their friends who study abroad and post about their experiences there. The author concluded that social media impacts one's choice of university. Moreover, based on the conducted interviews she also stated that despite that, the decision to study abroad was made on the individual level since it is made after one considers all costs and risks of moving abroad (Hidayati, 2017).

Similar to Hidayati's study (2017), the goal of the research presented in this master's thesis is to understand how aspiring international students decide to study abroad and to what extent social network sites influence this choice.

In another study Sazana Jayadeva (2020) focuses on the influence of social network sites on international students from India. The researcher focuses on Indians who were applying for master's studies in Germany and on those who were already enrolled in German universities. The study took place in two stages. During the first stage, Jayadeva (2020) observed "Study in Germany" groups: 4 on Facebook and 15 on WhatsApp. During the second part of the

study, she conducted 45 semi-structured interviews to explore “how people navigated or were navigating the process of coming to study in Germany” (Jayadeva, 2020, p.2243).

Participants of the Facebook and WhatsApp groups in the first part of the study were represented by both: aspiring students who needed assistance, and students who were already studying in Germany. The main goal of the chosen groups was to navigate people through their university and visa application processes. During her research, it became apparent that aspiring students prefer WhatsApp communities over Facebook ones due to their convenience. Respondents also stated that they perceive WhatsApp groups as more intimate spaces than Facebook communities because, in WhatsApp groups, one does not have to care about writing a whole post but can exchange short informal messages. Furthermore, it became evident that users in WhatsApp groups are more active: one could expect to get a notification at any moment of the day or night. One could get any required assistance: legal, university or course-related advice, travel-related advice, whenever needed. Moreover, thanks to these groups, one has an opportunity to establish connections with other members of the group and plan various activities with those people. It happened that members of these online communities would organize some get-together events or plan a trip to the country of destination together (Jayadeva, 2020).

According to Jayadeva (2020), with the help of social network platforms group members were establishing so-called “latent ties”, this term describes the phenomenon of creating connections with people who one has never met before, with strangers. Opposite to this term, “weak ties” describe a phenomenon of maintaining already existing connections, with people with whom one has had an encounter (Jayadeva, 2020).

Furthermore, one more interesting observation made by Sazana Jayadeva (2020) is the presence of a "hierarchy" in such groups. Some members were more appreciated and respected than others. The more respected members were perceived as “experts” who have

acquired a great amount of knowledge regarding all the application, visa and travel procedures. These so-called “experts” were also more active when it came to answering other participants' questions. Another highly respected group of participants were participants with high profiles. These members were receiving several admission letters from various universities. Within the groups for international students, people appreciated not only academic knowledge but also the knowledge of application procedures (Jayadeva, 2020).

To sum up Jayadeva’s study (2020), one should highlight three main findings of the conducted research. Firstly, Sazana Jayadeva (2020) showed that not only "weak", but also "latent" ties play a significant role when it comes to students’ migration. Secondly, the researcher was mainly focused on the aspirant migrants and on the process of how these aspirant migrants move towards their goal of studying abroad. Thirdly, Jayadeva (2020) examined how communities for international students operate. Moreover, she compared different groups of international students, which brought a new perspective on these communities. One of the main conclusions of this study was that due to these groups allowing one to connect and collaborate with other people, “to some extent then, these groups can be seen as democratising access to study abroad” (Jayadeva, 2020, p. 2255).

After reading Jayadeva's study (2020) a question regarding the significance of groups for international students arises. Are these groups useful sort of information and help aspiring students? During the study presented in this master's thesis, interviewees were asked about their experience with such groups. One of the aims was to see whether international students of Carles University utilize these sources of information.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

In conclusion, student movements are a complex phenomenon originating from premodern times. The complexity of it can be reflected by the difficulties in defining the term "student

migration" and differentiating it from the term "student mobility". In many studies, these two terms are used interchangeably, therefore, it is hard to draw a line between these two phenomena.

Becoming an international student is a well-thought choice. Though, there are some risks associated with the decision to study abroad. In the age of globalization, more and more people decide to receive education abroad for various reasons. One can be driven by the possibility of permanent migration, becoming a more competitive professional, developing new language skills, etc. Hovdhaugen and Wiers-Jenssen (2021) point out three dimensions of factors driving student motivation. Exploration, Differentiation and Pragmatism (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2021).

Knowing how popular international education has become, universities put more effort into recruiting and appealing to aspiring international students. Often, these institutions use various channels of communication with future applicants. One of these channels is social media platforms. One might state that in today's world, these platforms are deeply rooted in people's lives. Therefore, they influence aspiring students' decisions to receive education abroad. However, is this true? To what extent do social network sites influence one's decision? Maybe it is not social media but people around aspiring students who impact their decision.

There were several studies held on the topic of student migration that aimed to understand the decision-making processes of aspiring students and the role of social media and social networks in it. However, new research is needed because it has been several years since these studies took place, and social media is rooted even deeper in people's day-to-day lives.



## 2. Methodology

The study described in this master's thesis took place at Charles University in Prague. Currently, roughly 56,000 students are studying at Charles University, among them, almost 10,000 students are international students (Charles University, n.d.). Therefore, choosing Charles University as the place for conducting this study could guarantee the diversity of the sample.

The study presented in the empirical part of this master thesis is a descriptive study supported by primary data. The descriptive method is used to describe and observe a situation or a phenomenon, as well as to identify the relationship between variables (Research Connections, n.d.). Qualitative interviews were conducted to identify the extent to which social media platforms influence the decisions of aspiring international students.

The main questions to be answered in this study are the following:

- 1. To what extent does social media influence one's decision to study abroad?*
- 2. What is the most convenient platform for prospective students to find information about the university and destination country?*

This research took place in two stages and was focused on the students and PR and Communication representatives of Charles University in Prague. During the first stage of the research, the goal was to gather information regarding international students' experiences with social media. To do that sixteen face-to-face offline and four online semi-structured interviews were conducted among international students of Charles University.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a method of data collection for this stage of study since it allows the researcher to have two-way communication with participants of the research. This type of interviewing allows respondents to share their experiences and provide

more information and details related to the topic of study. A semi-structured interview stands for the type of interviewing during which the researcher has a list of predetermined questions. However, not all the questions are predetermined (Wilson, 2013). Furthermore, the researcher doesn't need to follow the same interview pattern with all study participants (George, 2023). A sample of an interview guideline is attached (see Appendix 1).

During the first stage of the research, respondents were asked questions regarding their decision-making process and experiences with social media platforms when planning to study abroad. The interviews began with a small talk regarding one's feelings associated with moving abroad and becoming an international student. Then, the conversation went into the discussion of how participants chose Charles University and the Czech Republic as their destination and which sources of information they were using when making this decision. Interviews were continued with a more in-depth discussion of various social media platforms, groups for international students and other platforms such as university and faculty websites. Furthermore, respondents were asked to recommend an online platform for aspiring international students to discover which platforms are more convenient than others. All interviews were usually concluded with one of the main questions of this study: " In your opinion, who or what influenced your choice of becoming an international student?".

Respondents for the first part of the study were chosen by snowball sampling methods. Participants helped researchers in the recruitment process by providing contact details of other potential interviews. The snowball sampling method stands for a nonprobability sampling type. Such a method describes a situation when participants of the research assist research in recruiting future participants by referring to their acquaintances (Nikolopoulou,

2023). The first phase of this study was held between the 28th of February and the 12th of April 2022.

The second stage of the research aimed to identify the university's expectations regarding the use of social media platforms and university websites by aspiring international students. With this goal, there were conducted two semi-structured interviews: one in-person interview and one interview via email with the representatives of the Communication and PR departments of the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Arts. One of the interviews was held via email since this was the respondent's preferred means of communication for this study.

During the second stage of the research, PR representatives of Charles University were asked questions regarding their experience with social media and to gather the university's view on the significance of these platforms. At first, participants were asked questions about the importance of social network sites for the university, then they shared their experience of communicating with prospective students and posting content online (on social media, as well as on the university and faculty websites). Lastly, participants expressed their perspectives on whether social network sites are an effective marketing tool. Interviews with the representatives of the communication and PR departments complement data gathered from international students and give one a glimpse of how universities incorporate social networks in their marketing strategy. See Appendix 2 to find a sample of a questionnaire.

Respondents for this part of the study were chosen by judgmental or purposive sampling since the required information could be obtained only from the faculty members who have insider knowledge of the university's marketing strategies and works with social media and other platforms. Judgmental or purposive sampling describes the strategy when a researcher purposively selects participants to gather data that cannot be obtained from others

(Taherdoost, 2016). The second stage of this study took place between the 25th of May and the 30th of June 2022.

The interviews during both stages of the research were recorded, transcribed, and qualitative data analysis was performed. All of the interviewees were informed about the purpose of this research and were provided with information about the storage of the collected data. Informed consent was signed by all respondents of this study.

There are some limitations to the conducted study. One of the limitations of the semi-structured interview is an interviewer who lacks skills and experience (Wilson, 2014). In the case of this study, the interviewer did not go through the necessary training. However, several pilot interviews were held to gain interview-related skills. Furthermore, to avoid too much differentiation among the interviews, which might lead to an inability to compare the data, the interviewer tried to follow similar patterns during the interviews. Moreover, some follow-up interviews were conducted to gather missing information. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are a time-consuming research method for both respondents and the researcher. Therefore, to avoid any inconvenience, respondents were offered a possibility of an online interview. Unfortunately, there is another limitation to this research method: as it was mentioned above, there is a possibility of a biased analysis of data. To mitigate this researcher attempted to include various points of view and opinions in the results part of this work. It is also recommended to broaden the sample for future studies to get more perspectives on the issue. Lastly, due to some respondents not being fully proficient in English, it was harder to transcribe and decode their interviews, consequently, due to the high risk of distortion of participants' opinions, some interviews were excluded from the sample.

### 3. Results

Sixteen interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data for this study. However, after transcribing and analyzing the gathered information, it was decided to include only twelve interviews in this research. Four interviews were eliminated due to the lack of information that they were providing the researcher with and language difficulties. These interviewees were hesitant to share their experiences, so their interviews contained several "Yes" and "No" answers, as well as short answers. Furthermore, because of language difficulties, the decoding was challenging, hence, to avoid any distortion of the respondents' opinions and misunderstandings these interviews were excluded from the sample.

International students who took part in the conducted study represent nine countries: India, Mongolia, China, Indonesia, Germany, Iraq, Russia, USA and Mexico. The youngest participant was twenty-two years old at the time of the interview, while the oldest was thirty-seven years old. Among those twelve respondents whose interviews were included in the study, four respondents were male and eight female. They represent three faculties of Charles University: the Faculty of Humanities, the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics and the Faculty of Social Sciences. The sample included one Bachelor's, one PhD and ten Master's students. ( See Appendix 3 for participants' profiles).

Thematic analysis was chosen for the analysis of data gathered during this study. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method which is used to identify explicit or implicit patterns within a group of texts such as interviews. These patterns have to capture data that is significant and relevant to the conducted study (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). The thematic analysis includes several steps, Riger and Sigurvinsdottir (2016) highlight six steps involved in this method of data analysis. During the first stage, a researcher should transcribe and get familiar with the conducted data, and start looking for the patterns. The next step in thematic

analyses is to create codes which can be grouped into potential themes (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). Codes refer to the piece of information that was labelled to identify key concepts and significant findings (Delve & Limpaecher, 2002). The third step is to search for the themes, then, one should identify themes relevant to the study and its purpose. During the fifth stage, one names and defines previously identified themes. Lastly, the research report is produced based on the themes identified during the data analysis (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016).

Thematic analysis was chosen for the data analysis due to its suitability for the analysis of large data sets. This data analysis method allows one to gain deep insights from the data and present various perspectives (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

### **3.1 Motivation to study at Charles University**

Becoming an internationally mobile student is a significant decision in one's life. As it has been stated above, it is driven by various factors and motivations. Depending on a family, country, educational and economic background, individuals might have different stimuli for leaving their home country and studying abroad. Respondents of this study are not an exception to this. Choosing Charles University in Prague was a rational and well-considered decision for them, therefore, it was one of this study's goals to reveal the participants' main motivations behind their decision.

Participants of the first stage of the research mentioned various reasons to enrol at Charles University. Some respondents were driven by the possibility of experiencing something new and unfamiliar. For these participants studying abroad was an opportunity to get to know a new culture and environment and immerse in it. These interviewees mentioned the beneficial location of Charles University. Some participants stated that Prague is a beautiful city to live in and explore as well as that the location of Prague within Europe allows one to travel easily

to other neighbouring countries. These statements go back to the Exploration dimension related to the non-educational gains (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2021).

*“I like the idea of being in Prague. You know, I heard a lot that it’s a beautiful place and I looked up the other place, in Germany, which was apparently really destroyed but the war and it’s all-new. The US also has a different vibe and stuff, so I like the whole feel of Prague from what I have seen on social media.” (Respondent 10).*

For other respondents, future prospects were more valuable than experiential gains. These interviewees were more concerned about their future competitiveness in the job market. For them studying abroad is a chance to boost their resume and become more valuable candidates in their area of expertise. According to these respondents, becoming an international student is a great way to learn a new language or improve already acquired language skills. Furthermore, some of the interviewees pointed out the low quality of education in their country of origin. However, not only the low quality of education can push one to become internationally mobile, but also the quality of the program at the university of destination and its compatibility with one's future career plans also played a significant role for some interviewees. Another frequently mentioned reason was the reputation and prestige associated with Charles University. Its long history and famous alumni make Charles University a well-known and respected institution. These reasonings relate to the Differentiation dimension highlighted by Hovdhaugen and Wiers-Jenssen (2021). The statement of Interviewee 8 confirms the importance of the university’s reputation:

*“Franz Kafka studied here at Charles University and Milan Kundera and Karel Capek I think, so when I received the letter from the university, I was really happy because I like those writers and it is an honour to study here because they studied here”.*

Furthermore, if one talks about future-related motivation, it is important to mention that studying abroad might be a way to permanently change one's country of residence. Becoming

an international student for some participants is a part of their immigration strategy. Some of the interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with their living conditions back in their home country and stated that for them studying at Charles University is an opportunity to relocate to Prague. That was the case for respondent 8:

*"I studied journalism in Russia, and I have my bachelor's diploma from Russia. I do not like it. Also, the situation with freedom of speech and with other kinds of freedom in Russia is currently in a really bad state, so I was thinking about immigration for a quite long time. I decided to kill two birds with one stone "*

According to data gathered during the research, another aspect making Charles University a great study destination is the cost of life and education. Several respondents stated that the tuition fees set by Charles University are considered affordable compared to other higher institutions, especially if one talks about Europe, Australia or the USA. On top of that, the costs of living in Prague and the Czech Republic are comparatively low and affordable. This was one of the main factors for respondent 3:

*"The first reason is the cheap living costs and study fee compared with universities in America and Britain, even New Zealand, Austria and the study fees are cheaper and the living costs are cheaper and considering the money I saved before I thought it could cover my studies here"*.

Furthermore, the university's entry requirements and enrollment process were highlighted as an additional motivation. Several participants noted that Charles University has fewer entry requirements as well as entrance exams than some of the other universities.

In conclusion, the reasons behind the decision to study at Charles University in Prague varied for the respondents of the conducted research. For some, future career benefits mattered more, this is the so-called differentiation dimension (Hovdhaugen, 2021). Moreover, Hovdhaugen and Wiers-Jenssen's (2021) Exploration dimension could also be identified



during the data analysis: some interviewees mentioned the possibility to gain new experiences and immersion into a different culture. However, there were also factors that cannot be related to any of the three dimensions described by Hovdhaugen and Wiers-Jenssen (2021). These are the following factors: low cost of life and education and simple entry requirements. Overall, usually participants of this study were motivated by the combination of two or more reasons that could belong to different dimensions. This can be seen in the statement of interviewee 12, where the interviewee talks about the expenses and the program, as well as familiarity with the place of destination:

*“I was searching around, looking for the best options. Then I came to realize that Charles University had the program, so I was like okay, this can definitely work. I know the place, I have been there, and I think what finally made it was the fact that I was like yeah, I saw the prices and I searched the webpage and everything. It was like, I can receive what I want and it was price-wise the best option, so yeah I think that was mostly how it came to me”.*

### **3.2 Sources of Information Used by International Students**

Another theme discovered during this research is the sources of information used by the research participants before coming to Prague. Respondents of this study reported using various sources of information to choose the country and university of destination and to gather necessary information regarding the application and visa processes. According to the respondents, their choice of platforms depended not only on the quality of information posted on these mediums but also on how user-friendly these platforms are. The sources used by the participants of the conducted study varied from one respondent to another. In this study, some of the most frequently mentioned sources of information were university and faculty websites, ranking websites and forums.

Participants of this study used ranking websites that were proven to be a useful platform since these types of websites not only allow one to explore various universities and programs but also give one an overview of the quality of education there. These types of websites are useful when one has to narrow down universities and countries since it provides an overview and ranking of various programs and degrees. One can easily navigate these sites by choosing a desired field of study. After that, he/she will be given necessary data regarding tuition fees, the location of the university and the address of the university's official websites. In some cases, one can also find people's reviews about the university or a particular program. For this study's respondents, ranking websites, especially the most known ones, acted as legitimate sources that can confirm the reputation and quality of education in a particular university.

*"...yeah I googled Prague and Charles University, and I read about rankings, university rankings, and it was important for me to find out that Prague has a good university, it's a good university." (Respondent 11)*

When talking about the university websites, participants highlighted the necessity of checking this platform to find out all the details regarding the admission process, tuition fees, contacts and other necessary information. University official websites are an obvious platform that should be checked since no one can describe an institution's requirements better than itself. It provides not only reliable and detailed information regarding the admission procedure and tuition fees but also information regarding housing options and life in the country of destination. Furthermore, one can find all the necessary up-to-date contact information on this platform. However, one should not forget that institutions are trying to "sell themselves" through these websites, so the information presented there can be biased.

*"The university's website itself and faculty website are really helpful. I mean, there is also a contact person and stuff like that for it, so it is very helpful." (Respondent 4)*

Another medium used as a source of information by the respondents of this study is social media platforms such as Youtube, Instagram, LinkedIn and Facebook. Social media is a more entertaining medium: it allows one to gather information in a more informal and usually less detailed manner. Moreover, often posts on social media are supplemented by pictures and videos which makes it look more fun and personalized. Seeing various pictures and videos might help one feel more connected to an institution or a place of destination. It also contains a great amount of information regarding different universities, countries and people's personal experiences.

*"Finally I went on YouTube and I remember, I wrote about five top universities in Europe for media studies and communication, something like that. There was this one. This program was one of them. That is how I found the program and started to apply". (Respondent 6)*

However, surprisingly when asked about groups for international students on platforms such as Facebook, only a few interviewees stated using them. These respondents reported using these groups mostly after admission to Charles University, to find accommodation in Prague or to connect with peers from the same program. Based on the latter, one might argue that such groups help one to create a bond with the country and university of destination, as well as to create a sense of belonging to a community. This can be related to the statement that social media reduces the risks and costs of migration by giving one the possibility of creating weak ties. These interpersonal ties reduce the risks of international movements (Dekker & Engbersen, 2012). However, these groups have downsides as well, for example, some of these respondents expressed feeling overwhelmed by the number of daily posts in such groups.

*"I think, I was in the groups for international students in the Czech Republic but honestly there were a hundred posts a day and it was too much for me. I quit this group after, I think, 3 weeks or something like that" (Respondent 8).*

It is necessary to point out that among the social media platforms forums such as Reddit stood out as a separate category. Reddit differs from other social media platforms since it is a platform that urges its users to interact and create content. Anyone can post on Reddit, people can share posts or links, and other users can discuss it or reply to other people's comments under the post. Content and comments on this medium can be upvoted or downvoted, depending on whether other users agree/disagree with it or like/dislike what was shared. Users are receiving so-called "karma" points when their content is upvoted and lose these points when it gets downvoted. Reddit creates a sense of community, where one can seek help or advice on any topic. There are various communities that exist within Reddit, and each of them focuses on a specific topic which allows one to follow content that he/she is interested in. However, despite providing one with various information on different topics and creating a sense of community, one cannot fully trust the content of this medium since it can be misleading or faulty (Anderson, 2015).

According to the interviewees, forums proved to be useful when trying to get a more objective perspective on various universities. These platforms were a convenient way to learn people's opinions on universities and particular programs. For the respondents of this study, reading forums was a way to get first-hand experience from other people. This confirms Dekker's and Engbersen's (2013) argument that social media allows one to get unofficial insider information.

*"I do think finding independent platforms, like again I am not really a Reddit user, but Reddit was really helpful to see people's opinions about the school. If they really enjoyed it, for example, I looked at some private universities. If people are posting their experience or being like this is kind of a scam or they say this was a lot of money and not a lot of what I got out of it." (Respondent 9).*

Another category that emerged during the coding process was personal networks. During this study, it became apparent that many respondents were affected by and relied on the information provided by others. That could be their friends, supervisors, current students of the university of destinations, family members or the university's international office. Previously, Dekker and Engbersen (2013) noticed that migrants are more likely to move to a place where they have already established connections. One might assume that these already existing connections act as a reassuring factor for aspiring students, they help aspiring international students to fully commit to a decision or in some cases, influence their final choice of university or a country of destination.

*"For me, it was like one of my supervisors at Charles University was in Germany for a few months at my old university. That is just how we got in contact, and then also the supervisor of my master's thesis introduced us to each other. So we already worked together. That is basically how it started..." (Respondent 5)*

Participant 7 also emphasized the significance of personal connections:

*"It was a colleague from an internship I did. She also did the master's at Charles University and we were talking about it. She gave me the impression to go to the Czech Republic, to go to Prague, go to Charles University. I got a lot of things from her about the flat, about the study fees and something like this."*

Furthermore, most of the respondents used social network sites to maintain already existing connections or to create new ones by communicating online. For example, some respondents recalled trying to establish connections in the country of destination before their arrival there. By doing this aspiring students were not only trying to create ties with their future homes but to also resolve their worries and issues. When it comes to international mobility, social media reduces distance by allowing people to connect with each other and stay connected regardless of time and distance. Interviewees reported using platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and

WhatsApp for this purpose. Though, according to the results of this study, previously mentioned platforms were used for more informal communication. While the main platform for keeping in touch with the university officials was email (which is not considered social media). In summary, respondents utilized various platforms before and after applying to Charles University. They reported using different mediums depending on what kind of information they needed: for the official information regarding the application or visa process, respondents tended to visit Charles University's website or their faculty's website, to find accommodation or get familiar with their classmates they tended to join groups for international students. At the same time, they would use forums to get more unbiased opinions on the university. Consequently, social media platforms and official websites such as university, faculty and ranking websites were used for different purposes.

When asked to describe a convenient platform, respondents pointed out the following requirements: clarity of information, easy navigation (the website should be user-friendly), availability of necessary information regarding deadlines and requirements, and availability of various kinds of information. Moreover, based on the collected data the platform must stay up-to-date, otherwise, it might create a bad look for the institution and give one the impression that data is not relevant anymore or this institution is not working properly. Some stressed the necessity of FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) pages where aspiring students would be able to find answers to the questions or issues they might face.

*"... there has to be like an FAQ page with not just frequently asked questions, but with any question you might possibly have related to the study. Also, the connections between pages should be found really quickly, so if I am looking at the course and how the course is structured I should be able to find how to apply the deadlines very easily." (Respondent 1).*

When respondents were asked to specify a convenient platform and recommend one for aspiring international students, their answers varied once again. While some respondents

recommended using university and faculty websites, or ranking websites, others recommended using platforms such as forums as well as checking social network sites. Moreover, participants of this study keep emphasizing the importance of social networks and, specifically, forums when seeking advice and getting opinions from other people.

### **3.3 Trust and Reliability towards Information Posted Online**

As it was previously mentioned, respondents of this study reported having different levels of trust towards the content posted online. Interviewees reported to have more trust in information posted by official sources such as university and faculty websites, embassy websites or educational consuls. During the research, it became evident that in comparison to other platforms university and faculty websites seem more regulated and trustworthy because the information is posted by the representatives of the university:

*“... I would just say that it sounds very official, it somehow seems more regulated, not everybody can post there and publish so yeah it sounds more trustworthy to me...”(Respondent 5)*

According to the conducted research, respondents tend to differentiate between the information on those mediums and social media platforms. Some respondents stated that information on social network sites is not as detailed as on other platforms, while others noted that one of the reasons not to rely on the information on social media is that it is to some extent created for entertainment:

*“...so the Honest Guide YouTube channels, for example, it is nice stuff to watch, but it is a lot of entertainment, so I didn't trust it to make my decision on university...” (Participant 10).*

Therefore, some mentioned the significance of analytical thinking when trying to gather information online, especially when using social media.

*"...social media is not bad too, from an aesthetic point, but maybe you need a critical perspective, critical viewpoint, so you have to reflect is this on social media the truth or good talk without basis behind it." (Respondent 11).*

When talking about social media, interviewees tended to differentiate between social media accounts created by outside sources and those that are run by the university or a particular faculty. This is due to the lack of trust towards the unknown sources. While university-run accounts seem reliable and legitimate, accounts run by other people might provide misleading or false information. Therefore, some respondents used social media platforms to check official university accounts instead of accounts created by outside sources.

*"I also searched on YouTube because they had some funny introduction videos from Charles University and from the Faculty of Social Sciences. I watched these and I also had a look at Instagram, at the account of Charles University." (Respondent 7).*

However, people tend to trust other people's experiences when it comes to getting a perspective on the quality of education and the overall experience of studying at a particular university. This is the so-called "discrete" insider information that social media helps to obtain (Dekker & Engbersen, 2013).

Therefore, despite the widespread use of social media platforms and their outside appeal to their audience, the content posted there raises questions and suspicions, especially when it comes to the information related to official procedures such as entry requirements. This is because of the lack of control and supervision over the information posted by the users. According to some interviewees, content on social media is prone to be biased, faulty or misleading. Therefore it seems that official platforms will remain the main source when it comes to information about entry requirements or visa procedures, while social media platforms will help establish connections with the country of destination by providing information about day-to-day life.



### 3.4 Factors Influencing One's Decision to Study Abroad

This subchapter will answer one of the main questions of this study: "To what extent does social media influence one's decision to study abroad?". To answer this question participants were asked to share their opinion on who/what influenced their decision the most. Answers and experiences that respondents shared during their interviews were also analyzed to get a deeper understanding of this issue. After data analysis, it became apparent that participants' responses and experiences can be separated into several groups based on what/who had the most influence on their decision.

The first group is represented by respondents who stated that the decision to study abroad was made solely by them. These interviewees stated that becoming an international student was their aim, it was something that they always had in mind. Therefore, their choice was not impacted by other people/outside sources.

*"When I make decisions, basically, it is just my decision. It is not quite popular in China to study in the Czech Republic. But it is popular for Chinese to study in America or Britain. Around me, all the information I could find on social media they were talking more about studying in Britain or America but the Czech Republic no..." (Respondent 3).*

These interviewees claimed that even when it comes to the choice of the university or the country of destination, the decision was based solely on their preferences. However, even though this group of respondents stated that their decision was not impacted by outside sources, some of them pointed out that social network sites somehow helped them after they already made the decision and got accepted to Charles University.

*"It just helped me adapt to a decision that I already made." (Respondent 1).*

Based on the interviews of this group's respondents, it becomes evident that despite not playing a main role in the decision-making process, social network sites helped respondents

to collect necessary information regarding daily life in Prague. Though social media was not the only source they used for this purpose, they used a combination of various sources to get a perspective on what life in the country of destination looks like. One can say that participants utilized various online sources to create a connection to the place of destination, this was previously noted by Hidayati (2017) in her study.

The next group is represented by participants who stated that their decision was influenced by people around them. Some shared that their family and friends had impacted them through their encouragement and support.

*"...one of the main points that pushed me to come here was my father. He was encouraging me to come here because of all the reasons I mentioned before, and my friend who lives here also told me it is a good beautiful city with good education..." (Participant 6).*

Other respondents shared that their friends/ family/colleagues recommended them to receive education abroad and specifically in Prague, in the Czech Republic. Furthermore, some respondents reported having relatives or friends who have studied abroad. Therefore, one might propose that social networks played a role in the final decision of this group's participants. This fact confirms Beech's (2015) findings regarding the importance of social networks. Beech (2015) stated that personal networks play a significant role in one's decision to study overseas. She argued that it is a key factor when it comes to student mobility since it determines whether the mobility will take place or not (Beech, 2015). In his interview, respondent 10 emphasised the significant impact that social networks had on his decision:

*"...I feel that all of that was after I had kind of owned that this is one of my goals or options that I want to pursue. Yeah, I actually think that most of the decision-making stuff happened from the peer group rather than social media."*

The last group of respondents that could be identified during the data analysis stated that social media to some extent influenced their decision to study abroad. Some of these

interviewees shared that social network sites helped them access information that would be unavailable otherwise. Others stated that this medium helped them to learn about their study program or Charles University itself. This was the case for respondent 9:

*" ... I did not really look at the social media presence too much, but with that said, if I went to a major university and looked at their social media and saw that it was really dated or weird I would be like okay, it is definitely not an up to date institution."*

It is important to note that some of the respondents who reported being influenced by their personal networks were, in a way, also influenced by social media platforms without them noticing it. Some respondents stated that they became interested in studying at Charles University after seeing their friends' posts on social media. In this case, social media becomes an intermediary between respondents and their acquaintances. It becomes a medium for spreading people's influence. If it was not for social media sites, the participants of this study might not have been influenced by their peers. This was the case for interviewee 4:

*"...both of my friends were in the ISIC program as bachelor students of Charles University. Of course, as a student Instagram story pops up, Snapchat and stuff like that and it was really fun. Like the campus life that they are having looks really fun, and I would like to participate in that, so it kind of influenced my decision." (Respondent 4).*

This was also the case for respondent 10, who at first emphasized the importance of social networks in his decision. At the end of the interview, he recalled watching one of the Youtube channels related to life in Prague. Therefore, there is still could be some subtle impact on his final choice:

*"I would say "The Honest Guide" YouTube channel was very attractive to watch, so I am sure that would have some impact on my decision. Maybe, I liked what I was seeing, so I would say that too."*

To conclude this section, the answers of the respondents of this study could be separated into three groups. The first group is represented by interviewees who claimed that decision to enrol at Charles University was solely their choice. Participants who emphasized the role of social networks belong to the second group. Lastly, the third group consists of respondents who stated that social media somehow influenced their decision to study abroad. However, after analyzing the data, it became apparent that due to the spread of social media, the line between the influence of personal networks and social media platforms is blurred. Nowadays, communication between people is often happening online with the help of social media, so it might be hard to estimate how much impact it has on its users.

### **3.5 Social Media's Importance According to the University's Representatives**

During the second part of the research, two representatives of Charles University's Communication and PR department answered questions regarding the university's perspective on the importance of social media platforms for aspiring students. Two specialists were asked questions regarding their perspective on why international students choose Charles University, where they get their information from, and their opinion on the significance of the social network sites.

Beginning with the motivation to study at Charles University in Prague, respondents pointed out the university's location, reputation and cost of life in Prague as the main factors influencing the aspiring students' decision. Furthermore, the quality of education and the content of the study program were also among the answers to this question. These answers are similar to what has been discovered during the interviews with international students in the first stage of this study.

*"I think that the main reason why foreign students choose Charles University to study is its historical significance in the world, its size, its opportunity to study the many faculties and*

*study programs. Of course, studying in the metropolis, Prague, has also a big importance. You study in the heart of Europe." (Representative 2).*

When asked about their perspective on where aspiring international students get their information from, respondents named university and faculty websites, study portals, and social media platforms. Though, respondents expressed that they believe that the university's and faculty's websites remain the main sources of information. During this study, it was also discovered that content posted on the university's official websites is similar to what is published on the university's social network accounts. Though, information posted on social network sites might be shorter, less detailed and more entertaining.

*"..we are trying to do it in the different styles to make it more easy to digest on SM and make it more fun, because on the website it of course has to be official, but we are trying to provide as much information as we can, not to make it too simple or to simplify it a lot too much." (Representative 1).*

Furthermore, similarly to international students' answers, representatives of the PR and Communications departments noticed that social media and official websites are utilized to get different types of information. According to interviewees, aspiring students are more likely to get official information from university and faculty websites, whereas information regarding student life and daily life is usually obtained through social media. This statement differs from the statements of the international students who participated in this study. Data gathered during the first phase of this research showed that participants of this study mainly communicate with the university via email. While communicating with their peers on social network sites. Though, this might occur because representatives of the PR and Communication departments have a bigger picture on this issue. Since they are dealing with thousands of students. At the same time, participants of the first phase of this research were sharing their personal experiences. Not to mention, the experience of the representatives of

different university departments might differ. Therefore, the answer to this question might vary from person to person. This fact was pointed out by Representative 1:

*"My colleague from the International Office would reply differently because he communicates with students via email solely, he doesn't do social media..."*

Based on the data gathered, social network sites are an important tool for universities since it helps to create a more relaxed and friendlier picture of the university. It helps to create a type of connection between aspiring students and an institution. This medium helps the university to look more down to earth as well as more connected with its students and applicants. Social media allows more fun and entertaining content with various attachments such as pictures and videos. Furthermore, according to Representative 2, social network sites are a great marketing tool, which when used correctly helps to attract international students:

*"In any case, social networks are a very important and necessary part of today. Definitely for the recruitment of future students, because you will attract a large number of people with paid and well-targeted promotion."*

Though social media is one of the main mediums for communication with aspiring students, participants of the second stage of this study believe that it is still only a complementary source for aspiring students. According to the representatives of the PR and Communication department, social network sites will not fully replace official platforms such as university and faculty websites since the information on those mediums is more detailed, official and diverse. However, it is a factor that, to some extent, influences one's decision to study abroad.

*"...maybe, it isn't their first thing, but I think it's a factor that contributes to the decision if they see that the university or a faculty is friendly and approachable and that they are caring for the students even through social media." ( Representative 1).*

Moreover, despite most questions revolving around social media during this stage of the research, the importance of personal networks was highlighted once again. It was mentioned

as a significant medium for spreading information and influencing aspiring students' decisions:

"I think that the main sources from which future students learn about Charles University are family and friends who are already studying with us." (Representative 2).

Overall, the opinion expressed by the representatives of Charles University is similar to what has been discovered based on the information provided by the participants of the first part of this study. Social media, according to this study, keeps proving to be an important medium of communication between aspiring students and universities of destination, as well as being a useful marketing tool for these institutions. Furthermore, based on the data gathered, it can be stated that information on social media platforms is more oriented towards creating a deeper connection between the institution and its followers. Information on such platforms seems to be more entertainment-oriented, less detailed and less serious.

## 4. Discussion

Student mobility is not a new phenomenon, however, despite its long history and the growing numbers of international students, there is little research done to understand the decision-making process behind it. Nowadays, people and institutions often refer to social media as the facilitator of student mobility. It seems that social network sites such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube are deeply rooted in people's daily lives. Therefore, it might be argued that these mediums have some influence on people's choices and decisions. However, is this true when it comes to student movements? And if yes, to what extent?

In her study, Hidayati (2017) stated that social media platforms have a major influence on the decision-making process of aspiring international students. The researcher claimed that not only it helps to build a connection between a student and the place of destination, but also provides him/her with necessary information (Hidayat 2017). However, data analysis of the study described in this thesis showed that social media sites were not as influential as other mediums such as university websites and study portals. Based on this study, one might conclude that despite social media having some impact on one's decision to study abroad, it does not define whether mobility will take place. According to the respondents of this study, social media platforms had little to no impact on their choice of university and country of destination. Surprisingly, interviewees resorted to other platforms when they were searching for necessary information regarding various countries and universities. Only a few respondents reported being influenced by social media. The reason behind this might be the lack of restrictions and censorship of the content posted online since this fact leads to a low level of trust towards the information posted on this medium. However, this discrepancy with Hidayati's (2017) study might be due to various factors such as the sample size or biases.

When describing and choosing convenient platforms, respondents of this study spoke favourably about university, faculty and ranking websites. Moreover, interviewees noted the



importance of checking official university websites since it presents all the necessary information aspiring students might need. More favourable attitudes toward official university websites might be motivated by the lack of trust towards the information posted on social media platforms as well as the diversity of information that can be found on the university and faculty websites. However, one can point out that while respondents reported using more official sources before admission to the university, social media sources were beneficial before coming to Prague since a lot of useful knowledge about daily life could be obtained from this medium. Since social media is often a more visual source of information, it could help one create a feeling of familiarity with the place of destination as well as create some kind of connection with that place.

Though social network sites are less impactful than expected, they proved to be an important medium of communication. This finding is similar to Jayadeva's (2020) study, where the researcher stated that groups for international students help to create "latent ties" (connections with people one has never met) and "weak ties" (already existing connections). Though, according to the results of the conducted study, not only groups of international students perform this function but social media platforms themselves. Furthermore, interviewees stated using social network sites for more informal communication. Whereas, email was the main platform for communication with the university. Based on these findings, one might claim that social media leads to greater interconnectedness between individuals.

This leads one to talk about the main factor facilitating student mobility- personal networks. According to the results of this study, personal networks played a significant role in respondents' decision-making processes. Previously, Beech (2015) stated that personal networks facilitate migration, these networks might even determine whether mobility takes place. This seems to be the case for this research's interviewees: some respondents stated getting recommendations to study in Prague or Charles University specifically from people

around them, and some also claimed that they know or are related to someone who went abroad for studies. Therefore, one might speculate that those who are in some way connected to other international students are more likely to become internationally mobile.

To conclude this section, here are the answers to the two main questions of this study:

1. To what extent does social media influence one's decision to study abroad?- Social media does not have a great impact on one's decision. Based on the results of this study, it does not influence one's choice of university or choice of country of destination, social media sites proved to be a complementary source for aspiring students. However, its importance should not be overlooked since social network sites help create new social connections and maintain old ones, it leads to the interconnectedness of people. Furthermore, according to some respondents, social media helps one to adapt to the already made decision by giving one a chance to explore the city of destination while being in one's home country. This study showed that respondents show more trust in life-related information on these platforms. Participants stated that it provides one with the information necessary to adapt to a new place such as where to eat, go shopping, how to get to various parts of the city, etc. Social media platforms give one access to insider knowledge about their planned migration. Furthermore, by also giving one the possibility to form personal connections, this medium helps one to create a sense of belonging and community that Hidayati (2017) was talking about. Such connections not only are reassuring for an aspiring student but also increase the possibility of student movement taking place. This is due to Dekker's and Engbersen's (2013) argument that people are more likely to choose a country as their destination if they have established some personal connections. This verifies the argument that social media reduces the risks of migration.

2. What is the most convenient platform for prospective students to find information about the university and destination country?- University's and faculty's official websites stood out

as the most convenient platforms due to the format and nature of the information posted there. Though, according to the conducted study, official websites are favoured when information regarding the admission procedure is required. On the other hand, forums were reported to be more reliable when getting a more objective perspective on the institution and particular study program.

Overall, globalization and the spread of social media lead to the interconnectedness of individuals, which impacts student decision-making processes. Though, the decision to receive education abroad is made on a personal level: respondents of this study decided to become international students after considering various factors and future benefits. Undoubtedly, factors such as social media and social networks had some impact on their decision. In some cases, it influenced respondents' choice of country or university. However, it seems that the first step to becoming an international student is to accept the idea of going abroad. This usually happens on a more personal level. What also became apparent is that likewise Hidayati's (2017) study, this research showed that usually the decision-making process can be divided into two stages: during the first stage future international students come to a decision to study abroad, they set this as their goal; during the second stage they are influenced by various outside factors such as personal connections and other sources, here they are deciding on the university and country of destination.

## II. Conclusion

Student migration is not a recent phenomenon- "throughout history, students and scholars have been drawn to important centres of learning and knowledge production" (Alves & King, 2022, p.180). Furthermore, the number of international students has been continuously rising: in 2000, there were 2 million international students, and in 2019, over 6 million students were reported (Sabzalieva, Mutize & Yerovi, 2022). Even if one takes a look at the Czech Republic specifically, despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the number of international students enrolled in Czech universities grew from 46,351 in 2019 to 50,121 in 2020. The country has faced an increase of 8.1% in the number of students who are holders of foreign citizenship (Studyportals, 2021). However, amid its long history and increasing numbers, this phenomenon remains complex, even when it comes to its definition.

According to Alves and King (2022), student migration is different from student mobility. Alves and King (2022) pointed out three main differences between these terms: duration, purpose and distance. Student mobility usually takes one to two semesters and represents "credit mobility"- student exchanges. Furthermore, often students participating in this type of movement relocate to neighbouring countries, whereas, student migration stands for mobility which takes several years since its main goal is to earn a degree. It is also usually characterized by long-distance relocation (Alves & King, 2022). If one looks at the current studies, it might be hard to notice the difference between student migration and student mobility. It is hard to understand whether the research is about one or another phenomenon, therefore, new studies that will draw a clear distinction between these terms are needed. Similarly, Alves and King (2022) differentiate between foreign and international students. They notice that while the former term is based on citizenship, the latter is based on the country of origin and previous place of residence. Moreover, while international students are often seen as privileged, foreign students are often looked down on (Alves & King, 2022).

The main goal of this thesis was to understand the impact of social media on aspiring international students' decision-making process. The following categories emerged during the data analysis for this study: participants' motivation to study abroad, sources of information used by international students, trust towards the information posted online, respondents' decision-making process, and the university's expectations and experience with social media platforms.

Deciding to study abroad is not an easy choice. Therefore, this study's respondents mentioned various motivations behind choosing Charles University in Prague. Previously, Hovdhaugen and Wiers-Jenssen (2021) highlighted three dimensions of motivation to study abroad. The first dimension is called Exploration, it stands for non-educational motivation such as exploring new cultures and travelling. The second dimension is Differentiation, which describes a situation where one is driven to study abroad due to the future perspectives it might bring. This might be better education in the country of destination, the prestige of the institution, etc. The last dimension, based on Hovdhaugen and Wiers-Jenssen (2021), is Pragmatism that stands for the push factors in one's country of origin. This could be one's inability to enrol at an educational institution in his/her country of origin or a few scholarship opportunities (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2021). In the study presented in this master's thesis, respondents mentioned two dimensions highlighted by these authors. Those are Exploration and Differentiation. For example, some respondents were drawn to this choice due to the great location of the Czech Republic. This can be connected to what Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen (2021) described as a desire to gain new cultural experiences and acquire new travel opportunities. At the same time, other participants were more focused on their long-term benefits such as higher competitiveness in the job market, the possibility of learning a new language or a possibility of permanent migration to the Czech Republic. However, according to the interviewees, they were not driven by any of the factors related to

the Pragmatism dimension. Though, it is important to note that respondents noted that their choice was driven by the tuition cost as well as the cost of living in Prague. These factors were not mentioned in Hovdhaugen and Wiers-Jenssen's study (2021). However, based on this study, one of the main motivations for this research's respondents to study here was the university's reputation. Though, during the data analysis, it appeared that it is impossible to highlight only one reason why interviewees chose Charles University. Usually, the decision to move abroad for studies is a combination of various factors and motivations. Often, respondents stated a single factor at the beginning of the interview, but during its duration, they mentioned several others.

The same goes for the sources of information that participants utilized. Interviewees reported using various platforms from social media sites to official university websites. However, based on this study's results one might claim that university and faculty websites are the main platforms. Especially, when it comes to the information regarding the admission procedure. On the other hand, when it comes to getting others' opinions on a particular university or program participants favoured forums over other mediums. Another significant source of information turned out to be personal connections. Some interviewees claimed to learn about Charles University through their friends, family, and acquaintances. While some participants had face-to-face conversations, others got information from their acquaintances' social media accounts. Social media sites were used as an information medium as well. However, respondents reported having a lower level of trust towards the information on social media. Unless the information is posted by an official university account or a medium that respondents are aware of. Therefore, based on this study social media was a complementary source of information, which is more entertainment-oriented. Though, it proved to be an effective medium for informal communication and for spreading other people's influence. Unexpectedly, only a few respondents joined groups for international students. Moreover,

they reported being overwhelmed by the amount of information posted there, which resulted in them leaving these communities. Therefore, based on these results one might conclude that groups for international students were not useful for the participants of this study.

Official university and faculty websites were also mentioned during the discussion of the convenient platforms. Respondents highlighted the reliability of the information posted on these mediums. Though, according to the respondents, another significant feature of a convenient platform is being user-friendly. These features might be the reason aspiring students are being drawn to platforms such as ranking websites and official university websites. Furthermore, university representatives that participated in this research had similar views to what has been discovered during the interviews with international students- they emphasized the significance of the university and faculty websites for aspiring students.

When it comes to the role of social media in one's decision to study abroad, it becomes apparent that each participant's situation is different. During the data analysis, it appeared that social media is so deeply rooted in today's life to the extent that some respondents did not realize using this medium. This was the case for the participants who stated that their decision was influenced by people around them. Some participants reported seeing their friends' posts or stories. Others communicated via social media platforms. In this case, it is hard to estimate how much influence social network sites had on one's decision. However, based on this study one might state that this medium strengthens social connections and helps to create new ones. What became apparent is that despite the increasing consumption of social media, aspiring students do not fully trust this medium. Though most of the respondents were gathering necessary information online, they mostly relied on official sources such as university websites. That is why social media does not have as much influence on aspiring students' decisions as one could suppose. However, it is still important due to several reasons. Firstly, respondents highlighted forums as useful platforms to get an unbiased opinion on universities

and specific study programs. Secondly, it is a medium that spreads other people's influence and helps to create and maintain "latent" and "weak ties", which was previously stated by Sazana Jayadeva (2020) in her study of aspiring and current international students in Germany. Therefore, social media platforms do influence one's decision to study abroad. However, when it comes to choosing the country and university of destination, respondents are driven by other factors such as their career and education goals, cost of life or the university's reputation. Moreover, during this study, Beech's (2015) statement regarding the importance of social networks was confirmed. It appeared that respondents often relied on their social networks for advice, opinion and encouragement. This was one of the main factors that impacted the interviewees' choices.

Representatives of the HR and Communication departments had similar views on the role of social media platforms. They stated that it still has a complementary role and does not have much influence on one's decision. Though it is still significant when it comes to the universities they can utilize this medium to attract more international students. Since the costs of social media campaigns are significantly lower than other advertising mediums (LYFE Marketing, n.d.).

Similarly to one of Hidayati's conclusions (2017), during this study, one could identify two stages of decision-making when it comes to international students. During the first stage, one fully commits to this decision, this can be his/her own initiative or this idea can be given to one by someone else, regardless. During the second stage of this process, one has to decide which country and university he/she should move to. This stage involves more outside influence from social media, traditional media and personal connections.

Further research is needed to get a more in-depth perspective on social media platforms and their impact. Since the research, it became apparent that social network sites have become an inseparable part of people's everyday lives that lead to greater interconnectedness. Taking



this fact into consideration, one might say that social media facilitates students' migration- it acts as a medium, a bridge between people and their influence.

Researchers should further look into the phenomenon of student migration. They should broaden their samples and include countries that are not typical study destinations. This will provide more inclusivity and more insights into the decision-making process as well as the factors driving students' migration. Furthermore, students' long-term plans should be studied. There are several studies available that focus on student's motivation to study abroad, but it is hard to find studies focusing on international students' lives after the conclusion of their education. The topic of gender in relation to student migration often seems overlooked as well. Overall, there are various aspects of the phenomenon of student migration that require more attention and in-depth research.

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#### **IV. List of Appendices**

Appendix 1: Sample of the questionnaire for the interviews with international students.

Appendix 2: Sample of the questionnaire for the interviews with the representatives of PR and Communication departments

Appendix 3: Participants' profile

## V. Appendices

### Appendix 1: Sample of the questionnaire for the interviews with international students.

Source: own representation

- How did you come to a decision to study abroad? (respondents' motivation)
- How did you perceive moving abroad / What were the feelings you associated with studying abroad? (stressful, exciting, etc.)
- Why did you choose the Czech Republic as the destination country and Charles university specifically?
- Do you share your own university experience on social media? Why?
- What sources of information have you considered when you decided to study abroad?
- What have you learned about universities in general?
- Did you seek help from groups for students on any social media? If yes, what kind of assistance did these groups provide?
- Do you differentiate between the official university groups and other groups? Why?
- Which website or platform was the most helpful when finding information regarding the university and/ or country of destination?
- What makes that platform a convenient platform?
- How much do you trust information on social media? (Do you trust agencies or university websites more? Were you double checking the information that you found on social media?)
- In your opinion, what has influenced you the most (your family, friends, social media, or was it your own decision)?
- In your opinion, to what extent social media influenced your decision to study abroad?

- Would you say that social media has influenced the choice of university or the choice of the country?
- Was social media a complementary or the main source of information for you?
- What are the sources of information that you would recommend for those who want to study abroad? Why?

**Appendix 2: Sample of the questionnaire for the interviews with the representatives of PR and Communication departments.**

Source: own representation

- How do you think prospective students learn about Charles University? (From friends, advertisements...?)
- What would you say is the main motivation for international students to choose Charles University?
- In your opinion is it necessary for a university to have social media accounts? Why? (If it is necessary, could you please specify which social media platform in your opinion is more important)
- Which platform would you say is currently used as the main communication platform for the prospective students at your faculty? (Email, any social media platforms?)
- Which platform would you say is more effective for recruiting international students and why?
- Would you say that the information posted on the official website and the university social media accounts differs? And if yes, how? Are the same sources of information used for all platforms?



- In your opinion, which platform do prospective students prefer more when trying to find information about the university: the university website, ranking websites, study portals or any of the social media platforms such as Instagram or Facebook?
- Do you believe that nowadays prospective students go on social media to do their research about the university?
- Would you expect social media to be a main or complementary source for prospective students when it comes to finding information about the university?
- Overall, would you say that social media is an effective tool for recruiting and engaging with international students?

### Appendix 3: Participants' profile

Source: own representation

Participant	Country	Gender
Respondent 1	India	female
Respondent 2	Mongolia	female
Respondent 3	China	female
Respondent 4	Indonesia	female
Respondent 5	Germany	male
Respondent 6	Iraq	female
Respondent 7	Germany	female
Respondent 8	Russia	female
Respondent 9	USA	female
Respondent 10	India	male
Respondent 11	Germany	male
Respondent 12	Mexico	male