The Influence of Social Media in Shaping Migration Decision-Making of Iranian Students in Sweden: A Survey-based Quantitative Study

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Abstract

This study explores the influence of social media on Iranian students' migration decisions, specifically choosing Sweden as their study destination. The study contributes to addressing identified gaps in understanding major factors and drivers of migration decisions and social media's potential role in the process. A quantitative approach was utilized to collect data through the online survey of Iranian students currently residing in Sweden. The online survey aimed to research the key migration influencers and assess the impact of social media on respective decisions. The analysis indicates that migration decisions are influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. Generally, migration decisions are influenced by economic factors, related to the country of relocation, political climate, and personal development potential. Social media, specifically Instagram and Telegram, was a valuable source of information and social interactions; its impact was moderate compared to identified influencers. Despite a clear role in creating migration perceptions, economic, social, and safety factors drive these decisions to this point.

KEYWORDS: *Migration Decision-making; Social Media; Iranian Students; Sweden; quantitative method; Survey.*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Understanding the Landscape of International Student Migration

Over the years, studying abroad has provided significant personal and professional international and intercultural experiences for countless students worldwide (Cushner and Karim, 2004). International student mobility, however, is not only significant from the perspective of educational, economic, and security concerns, but foreign students also play a distinct, and increasingly recognized role in international migration systems (Szelényi, 2006). The global pattern of international student flows may be explained by a combination of "push and pull" factors that encourage students to study overseas. "Push" factors operate within the source country and initiate a student's decision to undertake international study. "Pull" factors operate within a host country to make that country relatively attractive to international students. Some of these factors are inherent in the source country, some in the host country, and others in the students themselves (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Differences between the state of needs satisfaction and individual aspirations are a precondition for considering migration as a viable option (Bijak, Czaika & Prike, 2021). Regarding Iranian students' migration, a range of pull-push factors are identified that correlate, either positively or negatively, to the intensity of migration flow among the individuals involved. Examples include medical conditions, employment, politics, lifestyle and living standards, education, and security (Kazemi et al., 2018). Ultimately, the migrants' intention/decision to emigrate from their native country is the result of the interaction between both push and pull factors (Kazemi et al., 2018).

Therefore, students' decisions to migrate are influenced significantly by their country of origin as they look for opportunities for both academic and personal growth outside of their home country. The factors that push people into migration can include a wide range of things. Political and economic insecurity, conflict, violence, human rights abuses, and repressive governments affected many respondents, forcing them to leave. But decisions about where to go might include economic and social factors such as educational services (Browne, 2017). In this regard, Sweden with its reputed educational institutions and welcoming stance towards

international students have emerged as a much sought-after destination for overseas studies (Darkwa, 2023).

In the contemporary global landscape, Migration decisions are made in the context of personal needs and desires, and the individuals making these decisions face uncertain outcomes. Information about future opportunities is incomplete, and whether migration turns out to be a personal success or failure depends mostly on circumstances that are ex-ante unknown and ex-post not fully under the control of the individuals who migrate (Bijak, Czaika and Prike, 2021). Even when the majority of the initial expectations for migration have been fulfilled, the adaptation of aspirations may set off a "hedonic treadmill" effect that makes migrants feel even more deprived and unsatisfied in their new location. Individuals may also modify their goals for their lives and migration by considering the experiences—both good and bad—of others who have moved through social comparisons and role modeling (ibid). As a result, goals can change not only as a result of personal experience but also from learning about the successes, setbacks, and general well-being of others. Within this dynamic framework, the migration landscape has entered a new phase with the rise of social media and communication technologies. As underscored by Hidayati (2019), technology, particularly social media, has not only made migration more accessible but has also fundamentally transformed the decision-making process. Social media platforms serve as conduits for valuable information, effectively reducing the cost and risk associated with relocation. The virtual infrastructure provided by these platforms not only facilitates communication but also synchronizes contacts and fosters an environment conducive to proper migration planning (ibid).

The better knowledge or awareness a student has of a particular host country, the more likely they will select it as a study destination. (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002), therefore the role of media specifically social media is inevitable in gaining knowledge and information about the destination country and universities within that country.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study aims to examine the various factors influencing Iranian students' migration decisions, with a particular emphasis on the influence of social media. The study intends to answer the following research questions:

"How has social media influenced the migration decision-making process of Iranian students studying in Sweden?"

And the following Sub-Questions:

- What factors have primarily contributed to Iranian students' decision to migrate?
- What role has social media played in influencing Iranian students' migration decisions?
- What are the primary reasons Iranian students have chosen Sweden as their study destination, and to what extent has social media influenced their decision?

In order to answer the research questions a quantitative survey study will be conducted. The methodology chapter describes the research methods used to investigate the impact of social media on migration decisions among Iranian students in Sweden. It opens with a rationale for using quantitative survey-based research, which is reinforced by current literature that emphasizes the value of quantitative analysis in understanding migration decisions, and then moves on to examine research philosophy. The data collection process entails administering a survey instrument that includes both multiple-choice and open-ended questions, the survey link is distributed to Iranian students in Sweden via a Telegram channel. The survey design contains sections on demographics, factors influencing immigration preferences, the impact of social media, and motivations for choosing Sweden as a study location. Pilot testing and participant recruitment methods are outlined to verify that replies are clear, reliable, and authentic.

The theoretical framework chapter provides an integrated method for researching migration decisions among Iranian students who choose Sweden as their destination. It blends lifestyle theory, neoclassical economic theory, and social network theory to extensively study the process and media influences that underpin these decisions. By combining these ideas, the study hopes to capture the complex interplay between media impacts and other drivers of migration preferences among Iranian students who choose Sweden as a destination. This method allows for a thorough investigation of the complex dynamics involved in decision-making processes, while also emphasizing the importance of both media and non-media variables in determining people's migration decisions.

The literature review chapter explores the intricate factors involved in migration decision-making, with a specific emphasis on the situation of student migrants and the ubiquitous impact

of social media. Based on a wide range of academic works (Kennan and Walker, 2013; Marr and Millerd, 2004; Komito et al., 2011), the ways in which a variety of factors, such as individual goals, social networks, and environmental concerns, influence migration aspirations are investigated. This multifaceted perspective highlights the complexity of migration dynamics, as people decide on their migration paths based on a variety of objectives, talents, and uncertainties. Furthermore, according to Braunstock et al. (2019), the review highlights the evolving role of social media in migration processes. Social media platforms are more than just informational databases; they also play an important role in aiding migration by providing community connections, support networks, and current information on migration-related events. The inclusion of social media into the migration decision-making process emphasizes the platform's relevance for sharing information, building community, and enabling cultural integration.

In spite of the abundance of prior research, there are still significant gaps in our knowledge regarding the reasons behind and experiences of particular immigrant groups, like Iranian students (Nafari et al., 2017). This emphasizes the need for more research, especially in the context of Iranian students studying in Sweden, into the complex interactions between social media and migration decision-making processes. With the purpose of filling in these gaps, this study will employ a survey to investigate the ways in which Iranian students' migration decisions are influenced by social media. Through an examination of the various influential factors influencing decision-making among Iranian students, this study aims to provide insights into the intricate dynamics of migration in the digital age.

These research goals are critical for understanding the complex interplay of human motives, societal factors, and technological impacts in the migratory decision-making process of Iranian students studying in Sweden. This study intends to add both theoretical knowledge and practical insights by digging into the factors that influence migration decisions, as well as the special role of social media in molding these decisions. By addressing the research question and sub-questions described above, this study aims to provide details about the varied nature of migration decision-making among Iranian students. Furthermore, the study's findings may have implications for governments, educational institutions, and other stakeholders interested in promoting international student mobility and improving the overall student experience in host countries.

1.3 Motivations and Rationale for Research

This research is motivated by several considerable factors. In this context, it is important for me to acknowledge my personal motivation as a researcher exploring the migration decision-making process of Iranian students in Sweden, as well as my own experiences as an international Iranian student. It is critical to acknowledge the importance of insider research approaches in migration studies. Saidin (2016) discusses the limitations and potential inherent in insider research approaches, particularly in the context of studying migratory issues. Insider researchers who share cultural backgrounds or experiential commonalities with migrants provide unique perspectives on their lived experiences. Leveraging their insider status, these researchers can establish rapport more easily, access otherwise inaccessible social networks, and interpret subtle nuances in migrants' narratives. While challenges such as potential biases and ethical considerations exist, integrating insider research enriches the methodological landscape by providing nuanced insights that complement traditional outsider perspectives (Unluer, 2012; Fleming, 2018). As highlighted by Ali (2015), the fact that I shared the same norms, language, traditions, and cultural codes with the participants also facilitated the research process. Disclosing my dual role as a participant and researcher up front helps me to minimize any potential biases and preserve objectivity in my analysis. My experiences have highlighted the importance of social media platforms, educational opportunities, and societal dynamics.

Additionally, the research is motivated by the current gap and lack of information in the literature concerning the specific aspects of Iranian students' migration decision-making. By focusing on the Iranian context, the study hopes to add to the body of research on international student migration. The socio-cultural, economic, geographical, and political reasons and consequences of migration in both migrants' home countries and destinations have long been debated. However, little empirical study has been undertaken to examine the reasons for migration for Iranian students (Kazemi et al., 2018).

Furthermore, universities and other educational institutions may benefit from this study. International student enrolment is a major industry of importance to a country's economy (Hegarty, 2014). For academic institutions hoping to attract a diverse student population, “talented and self-funded” students (Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2013), it is critical to understand

the underlying factors that influence international students' decision to study abroad. Foreign students are being eagerly sought by many institutions in a range of countries that compete for good students (Kinnell, 1989). Overseas students are welcome by universities as an important contribution to the international character of the institutions. They are also a valuable source of income as they can often be educated at a marginal cost to the university (CVCP, 1985). Universities can improve the programs and support systems they provide by learning more about the factors and motivations that influence students' choices. Acquiring this knowledge not only improves an institution's ability to attract students but also increases its overall success and global competitiveness.

Chapter 2: Context and Background

In today's interconnected World, several factors influence the decision to migrate for education, including the growing use of social media. Over 4-5 million Iranians live abroad, making up a lively and diverse diaspora (Cohen & Yefet, 2021). The Iranian diaspora uses social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Telegram to promote communication and collaboration (Atlantic Council, 2023). Social media offers Iranians both opportunities and challenges, especially given Iran's political and social situation, which is marked by repression, censorship, and sanctions. Despite these limits, social media enables Iranians to communicate globally, breaking down physical barriers (Haghighat, 2020).

2.1 Iranian Diaspora, students, and social media

The Iranian diaspora, one of the world's largest and most diverse, comprises 4-5 million Iranians living abroad due to varied historical factors. Noteworthy for education, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement, they maintain a strong identity (Cohen and Yefet, 2021). Utilizing social media, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Telegram, the

diaspora connects globally, fostering communication and collaboration (Atlantic Council., 2023). According to DataReportal (2023), as of January 2023, 54.0% of Iran's population, equivalent to 48.00 million individuals, were active social media users. Between 2022 and 2023, there was a 2.1 million (+4.6%) rise in the number of social media users. By December 2023, the following social media sites held the largest market shares in Iran, according to StatCounter (2023): Instagram (58.5 percent), WhatsApp (18.9 percent), Telegram (10.8 percent), Twitter (5.6 percent), Facebook (3.7 percent), and others (2.5 percent) (StatCounter., 2023).

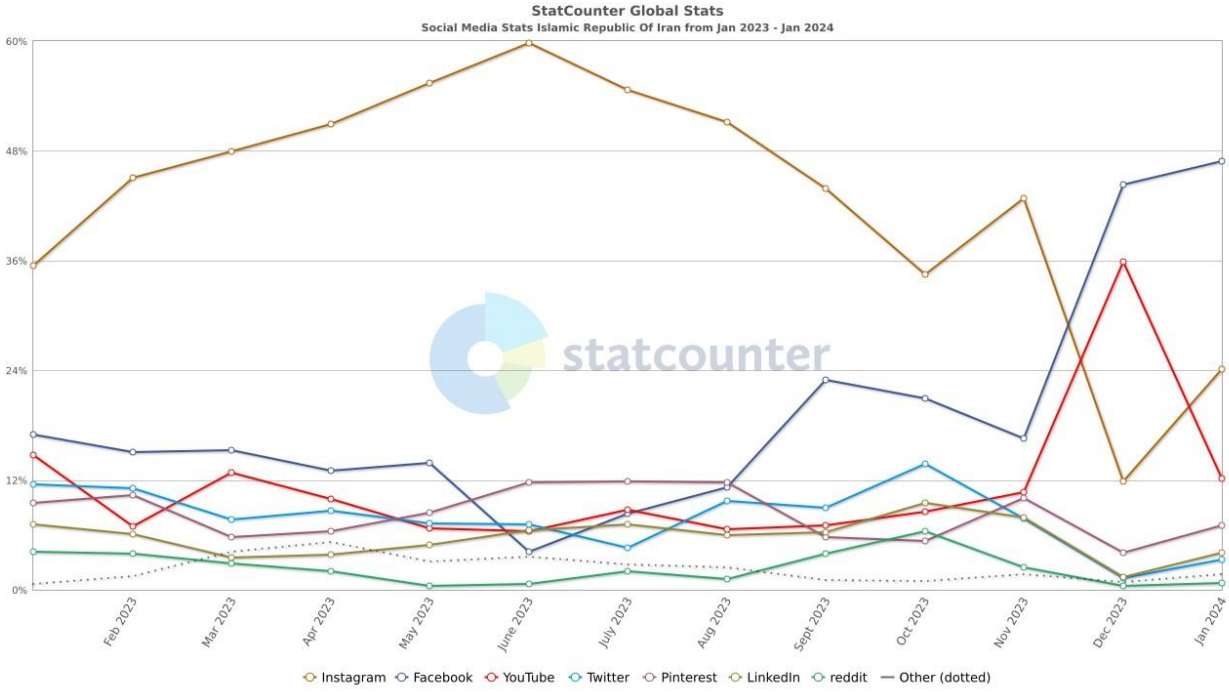


Figure 2.1: Social Media Stats of Iran

Source: https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/iran

Social media also offers opportunities and challenges for the Iranian diaspora and social media in the context of Iran's political and social situation, which is marked by repression, censorship, and sanctions. Social media platforms enable an international conversation among Iranians that cuts over physical barriers (Haghighat, 2020). This virtual environment turns into a channel for information sharing, offering insights into career chances, educational options, and actual migration experiences. Peer knowledge is an important resource in this digital world since it offers a range of perspectives.

Prioritizing privacy, Iranians employ pseudonyms, alter profiles, restrict contacts, and change platforms (Zohouri, and Khosravi, 2023). Despite precautions, challenges like abuse, hacking, censorship, and monitoring persist. Narmenji et al.'s (2020) investigation explores information-sharing patterns among university students in South Khorasan Province, Iran, on platforms like Instagram, Telegram, and WhatsApp. Using a survey, the study included students from Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology-affiliated universities in 2018-2019, with a minimum of six months' platform experience. Findings reveal trends in social network usage, emphasizing privacy. About 33% spend under an hour daily, while around 24.5% dedicate over three hours. Nearly half of the participants have been utilizing these platforms for over three years. Telegram emerges as the predominant platform for information sharing among the surveyed students (Narmenji et al., 2020). Gender, field of study, and education level emerge as nuanced factors influencing information-sharing behavior and privacy considerations. While no significant gender or field-of-study-based differences were noted in the selection of a social network platform, variations were observed in the types of information shared across these demographics. Additionally, a noteworthy difference in sharing behaviors was observed based on educational levels (Narmenji et al., 2020).

2.2 Iranian Student's migration in Sweden and Use of social media

the decision of Iranian students to pursue higher education abroad is highly significant because it influences their academic, professional, and personal lives in a multifaceted way. With an expected 695 students enrolled in higher education institutions in 2023, Iranian students are one of the largest groups of international students in Sweden (Erudera.com, 2022). Iranian students go to Sweden for a variety of reasons, including to be closer to their family, to pursue academic success, to better prospects, or to flee political repression (Statista, 2023). Engineering, the natural sciences, and the social sciences are the primary subjects studied by Iranian students in Sweden.

Migration of international students is a complicated process driven by several variables rather than just a geographic shift. Social networks are essential because they act as channels for the sharing of knowledge and the provision of emotional support (Beine, Noël & Ragot, 2014). In the academic year 2021–2022, 39,806 students from across the globe chose Sweden as their study location, according to official information from the Swedish Higher Education Authority. Compared to the 33,298 foreign students that attended Sweden in 2020–21, this indicates a 19% rise (Erudera.com, 2022). Out of the overall number of students, 39,806, more were free

movers (28,197) than exchange students (11,644). Free movers are students who study abroad on their own for a semester or a year without taking part in any exchange program. Lund University, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, and Uppsala University were the top universities in Sweden for students (Erudera.com, 2022).

Chapter 3: Literature Review

I have found the following research areas relevant to my thesis: literature about the migration decision-making process of student migrants, studies regarding social media and migration, and studies on the impact of social media on Iranian students' migration. I should mention that there is little literature about Iranian students' decision-making and almost none about the influence of social media on Iranian students' migration decisions; Thus, in order to include literature regarding Iranians, I added other studies about various aspects of Iranian migration into this literature review. I will go through each area in detail, studying their findings, in order to gain knowledge of what has been done so far on this topic.

3.1 Literature Synthesis

3.1.1 Migration decision-making process of student migrant

There are several studies examining the migration decision-making process of student migrants. Marr and Millerd (2004) and Elder et al. (1996) have explored factors influencing young people's decisions related to schooling, including social cohesiveness, choice, and connection. Additionally, research by Crivello (2011) and Elder et al. (1996) has investigated how academic performance and social bonding influence students' migration decisions for educational purposes. The following are the details:

Youth and student migration for educational purposes is a response to the difficulty in accessing quality educational institutions, particularly at the higher education level (Crivello, 2011). Eacott and Sonn (2006) also mention that young people's decision to leave their hometown in search of more knowledge and possibilities is influenced by the lack of educational options there. Youth movement for educational purposes, in particular, has a feature known as "liquid

migration." Liquid migration is characterized by initial temporary mobility with a high potential for eventual permanent migration; the traveler is an individual and often the first generation in the family and is unable to forecast their future travel plans (Drbohlav, 2012).

Three factors are presented by Marr and Millerd (2004) as factors influencing young people's migration decisions related to schooling. Social cohesiveness, social choice, and social environment are present. Social cohesiveness relates to cultural and environmental elements among young people, social selection refers to concerns of migrant selectivity, and the social context refers to socioeconomic and demographic considerations. Experiences with migration and gender were factors that determined the social setting. The majority of Indonesian migrants who are also students are men. However, the proportion of female migrants is on the rise, including those who are students. Young women have more chances than males to move, according to Magnan et al. (2007). Chiang et al. (2015) discovered no statistically significant distinctions in the percentage of young women and men who relocate to pursue higher education. In addition, young people who have migrated throughout their lives or whose parents have immigrated have a higher propensity to migrate than young people who have never moved (Easthope & Gabriel, 2008).

Examining the complexities of youth migration choices reveals the interconnected dynamics of social connections, academic achievement, and perceived societal expectations. According to Elder et al. (1996) and Crivello (2011), young people who perform academically well have a lot of options for moving around for educational reasons. Outstanding academic performance in their hometown can increase a young person's capacity to compete in higher education when they get there. The final factor to consider while deciding whether to migrate is social connection. According to Elder et al. (1996), social bonding is defined as a young person's attachment to their family and neighborhood at their place of origin, as well as to the customs and values of that community. This situation was created by individuals who, in contrast to their peers who did not move, believe that only young people with the highest academic accomplishment are eligible to travel overseas. According to Easthope and Gabriel (2008), young people perceive migration as a necessary action to fulfill their expectations and achieve a greater social position in their hometown.

3.1.2 Social Media and Migration

The second area of research is social media and migration. The literature acknowledges the pivotal role of social media in migration processes. Studies by Komito et al. (2011), Mahler

(2001), and Hidayati (2017) recognize social media platforms as essential sources of information, support, and communication for migrants. Blumenstock et al. (2019) and Diminescu (2008) have shown how social media networks connect migrants and facilitate information exchange. Moreover, McGregor and Siegel (2013) and Haug (2008) have explored the impact of social media on migrants' ties to their home countries and their integration into host societies. The following are the details:

Hidayati (2017)'s research explained the impact of social media on the migration decision-making process of Indonesian student migrants in the University of Groningen who used a social media account. This research considered the role of social media in the migration decision-making process of students who emigrated from Indonesia and how they use social media in the context of the migration decision-making process. The result showed Student migrants at the University of Groningen use their social media to gain information before they choose that university to study.

Emerging as pivotal forces in contemporary society, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter have revolutionized communication dynamics, enabling users to engage with digital content, interact virtually, and exchange information in real time. Concurrently, the phenomenon of migration, encompassing movements spurred by social, political, economic, and environmental factors across national borders (De Haas, 2021), underscores a complex societal transition. These two realms, seemingly disparate, are intricately intertwined, as evidenced by scholarly investigations (Komito et al., 2011).

Scholars have illuminated the multifaceted relationship between social media and migration, revealing a nuanced interplay that extends beyond mere communication facilitation. Social media platforms serve as influential agents shaping the perceptions, expectations, and decision-making processes of migrants, offering a plethora of information, guidance, and support (Komito et al., 2011). Moreover, they exert profound impacts on migrants' interactions with their home communities and host societies, influencing their integration trajectories and transnational ties (Mahler, 2001).

Furthermore, the convergence of social media and migration poses both opportunities and challenges for academic inquiry. While offering novel data sources and analytical methodologies, social media also presents ethical and methodological dilemmas, complicating the study of migration dynamics (Blumenstock et al., 2019). Through international networks facilitated by social media, migrants maintain connections with their homeland, bridging geographical divides and fostering transnational identities (Diminescu, 2008).

According to Kwek Kian (2018), social media can open up new communication channels that can change migrant networks and aid migration in four ways: (1) by fortifying ties to family and friends; (2) by establishing ties to people who can help with the migration process (and integration); (3) by establishing a network of latent ties; and (4) by producing a wealth of information that can be accessed by those interested in migration. Social media information is advantageous as it comes from a variety of sources. The place where they already have contacts and information is where migrants want to settle. The migration network may end up being the driving force for further migration. According to Blumenstock et al. (2019), the social media network connects migrants and non-migrants through strong links based on kinship, friendship, or common community origin. Social networking can help immigrants maintain ties to their own country (Diminescu, 2008). Facebook is a social media platform that migrants may use to connect with individuals they have met offline. They are less likely to utilize social media in their new location to make new contacts (McGregor and Siegel, 2013). Informal networks help migrants secure housing, jobs, and funding (Haug, 2008).

3.1.3 Impact of social media on Iranian students' migration

The third area of the review is the impact of social media on Iranian students' migration. Research by Sepehr et al. (2023), Hosseini et al. (2020), and Kazemi et al. (2018) delves into how social media influences Iranian students' migration processes, expectations, and decision-making. Nouri Hosseini (2014) has examined Iranian students' utilization of social media platforms for information-seeking, networking, and identity construction. The literature by Baghernejad-Javid and Valizadeh-Haghi (2022) emphasizes the importance of digital literacy skills and the credibility of information for Iranian students navigating social networks. Understanding how students evaluate sources and move through digital spaces is crucial for identifying obstacles and determining the efficacy of social media as a decision-making tool. Moghaddam (2019) highlights how Iranian students use social media to construct their online identities and present a favorable image of their migration experiences. Through curated content showcasing academic achievements and cultural integration, students influence perceptions of success and belongingness. The following are the details:

According to Sepehr et al. (2023), social media has revolutionized how immigrant consumers may communicate with their home nation as they work toward acculturation. They gathered information from a social media site that offers an interactive social setting where Iranian immigrants in Australia discuss their immigration experiences with non-immigrants who are

thinking about or intending to move to Australia using an ethnographic technique. Results demonstrate how social media users, both immigrants and non-immigrants, instinctively contribute to the development of two opposing collective narratives: the dominant, idealizing story and the counter, realistic narratives. The results show how the transmission of the dominant and counter-narratives shapes ideas about the home and host nations as well as the concept of migration from home to host. Additional research reveals the roles that these two communal narratives play in the development of three acculturative outcomes: well-being, self-validation, and ordinary experts. By emphasizing the acculturative processes and results of contacts with the home nation via a social media platform, these findings expand upon the notion of consumer acculturation. This includes, for instance, the way that engaging with one's native culture might acquire assimilationist characteristics when the hosting society—Australia, in this case—is glorified in the prevailing collective narrative.

The impact of social media sites on Iranian students' cross-cultural adaption in Finland was the subject of descriptive research by Hosseini et al. (2020). The results demonstrate how social media shapes expectations, offers knowledge and assistance, and facilitates learning and migration. Even if social media improves interactions and lessens cultural friction, the data also show that it is insufficient for assimilating into and interacting with Finnish culture. More useful social media strategies are deemed necessary for cultural adjustment, according to the study.

To investigate the reasons for Iranian students' migration to Malaysia and the main drivers of migration growth that have coincided with this trend, Kazemi et al. (2018) carried out a study. A cross-sectional descriptive-analytical research methodology was used. To take part in this study, a random sample of 250 Iranian undergraduate and graduate students studying in Malaysia was chosen. A self-administered questionnaire was modified to gather data, and at the guidance of research academics, it was tested for validity and reliability by computing the Cronbach's alpha value ($\alpha = 0.90$). "SPSS" version 19.0 was utilized for data analysis. A significance threshold of 0.05 was used. 219 questionnaires were filled in total. Male students made up the majority (73.5%), and the bulk of them (62.1%) were in the 25–30 age range. The most convincing reasons for these students' emigration to Malaysia were their low living and tuition costs (68%), excellent educational technologies at Malaysian universities (54.3%), the presence of foreign businesses in Malaysia (65.3%), the ease of admission to Malaysian universities (70.3%), the country's high global university rankings (58%), and the respondents' greater freedom in social interaction as opposed to Iran (49.3%). Subsequent investigation showed that the aim of Iranian students to immigrate to Malaysia was strongly connected with

the country's sociopolitical conditions, concerns about religion in Iran, affordable tuition costs, and availability of cutting-edge technology and global collaboration. The ease with which one may get an entrance visa, a resident visa, or a work permit for Malaysia, as well as the good standing of Malaysian universities in comparison to other foreign colleges, were all significant variables (P value < 0.001). According to them, a more concerted effort is needed to halt the brain drain by giving Iran access to high-tech, reasonably priced colleges and greater freedom in the political, social, and religious spheres.

Nouri Hosseini, (2014) performed a qualitative study with an emphasis on social and academic integration to investigate the experiences of Iranian students in Sweden. Students from several Swedish colleges who were Iranians took part. Language problems, distinct cultures, isolation in society, and high academic standards were among the other difficulties noted in the poll. Strategies for coping included learning Swedish, taking part in extracurricular events, getting used to school, and seeking help. As stated by Ghasemi et al. (2020), the high standard of education, the inclusive nature of Swedish culture, and the variety of the pupil's body all facilitated the process of integration.

Namei (2012) investigated if Iranians living in Sweden speak Swedish or Persian. This is investigated by looking at elements at the individual and minority group levels, which are thought to have an influence on the issue based on several earlier research. 188 bilingual Persian-Swedish people between the ages of 6 and 53 make up the subjects. They are split up into two groups: one with 100 students and the other with 88 adults, many of whom are the first group's parents. The two questionnaires used as elicitation tools ask questions about the subjects' socioeconomic status, language background, language environment in Sweden, language use patterns in various domains, degree of knowledge of Swedish and Persian, language competency, and attitudes toward their respective languages and nations. Findings indicate that Iranians residing in Western nations strive to return to their pre-migration quality of living. They contend that proficiency in the language of the majority is essential for both social and economic success. The findings of language socialization show that the second generation is receiving far more socialization in their second language and culture. Additionally, they speak Swedish far more proficiently than Persian. In addition to speaking fluent Persian, the first generation also speaks advanced Swedish, which might indicate that they intend to assimilate. It is also demonstrated that the primary language spoken in the family is Persian, but some Swedish is spoken as well, particularly by the youngest kids.

Besides this, taking a quick look at the digital literacy skills and credibility of information that Iranian students can distinguish from misinformation on social networks is also important

(Baghernejad-Javid and Valizadeh-Haghi, 2022). The second, but no less important observation is the need to know how the students move through the digital space and how they evaluate the credibility of the sources. There is a possibility to conclude the obstacles the students have and whether they can decide to use social media as a tool. Research has highlighted the way social media helps integration of the migrants. Regression analysis found out that there was a strong correlation between the strength of social ties on the part of students' social media and their intentions to migrate to Sweden. Social networks do exactly that by offering authentic data, which is up-to-date and sharp-witted, about studies in Sweden. As Iranian university students discuss experiences of academic workload, cultural adjustments, financial management, and visa procedures with each other through peer-to-peer discussions, blogs, and vlogs, their peers can learn from each other's candid experiences on all aspects of student life (Alavi, 2014). This eradication of monopoly on information has helped prospective migrants to evaluate critically what is factual disclosure and what is promotional materials provided by official authorities.

Furthermore, Moghaddam (2019) pointed out that social media is used by Iranian students to present their online identities, construct their image, and bring across the favorable image of their migration. Through carefully arranging and disseminating their scholarly accomplishments and national experiences in Sweden, these students reveal a picture of success and oneness with their home. According to the evaluation of social media content, 60% of students provide photos and narratives that disclose their cultural and academic achievements, and 40% of students focus on their integration into Sweden and the discovery of extracurricular activities. Chi-square tests implied the existence of a significant match between the frequency of identity disclosure on social media and the student's perceptions of their social status and a sense of belongingness. Therefore, the young people with a positive portrayal of the international student have their social status increased resulting in the demand of studying overseas in Sweden. Rienties and Nolan (2014) believe that virtual social media interaction forms students' cultural and social integration, academic quality, and career prospects in the country of hosting. Iranian students, inspired by the positive messages of success stories in social media, will start to admire Sweden as one of the Swedish high educational destinations that most motivate them to migrate.

3.2 Discussion

Prior studies have consistently highlighted the pervasive influence of social media platforms on migration decision-making processes. The literature review encompasses an exploration of migration decision-making processes and the influence of social media, supported by various studies. Despite the breadth of existing literature, several gaps persist. Notably, there is a limited focus on the motivations of Iranian students in migration decision-making, particularly regarding their choice of Sweden as a destination (Nafari et al., 2017). Furthermore, there is insufficient exploration of how cultural, social, and economic factors intersect with Iranian students' migration decisions and integration experiences (Hosseini et al., 2020).

Addressing these gaps through further qualitative research could provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by Iranian students pursuing higher education abroad, informing more tailored support mechanisms and policies. The increasing extent of the field of theoretical and empirical study on migration decision-making has the potential to give new insight into the different cognitive processes that control the migration decision-making process of people. However, as Czaika et al. (2021) highlight, research still rapidly growing on the determinants of individual migration could contribute to the area and possibly increase the understanding of decision-making processes. More empirical work needs to be done, though: this kind of empirical research would result in a deeper foundation on why people move in the first place, and that information would be used to question and critically challenge theories seeking to explain the extremely complex decision-making process that migrants go through.

While the literature on international higher education and international students' motives to study abroad is substantial, there remains a significant gap in research concerning the specific motivations and decision-making processes of Iranian students. As noted by Nafari et al. (2017), limited attention has been given to why and how Iranian students choose to pursue higher education abroad. This gap underscores the need for further research to explore the unique factors influencing Iranian students' decisions to study abroad, including their migration motivations, destination preferences, and integration experiences. Culture may shape the students' perspectives and expectations and thus influence how they comprehend and adopt information from social media while personal values and individual attributes might be also needed. This discovery process of these contextual subtleties plays a pivotal role in the multi-faceted understanding of the complexities behind migration sentiments.

In conclusion, while existing empirical research provides useful insights into migration decision-making processes, there is still more to learn, particularly about the motivations and

experiences of specific migratory populations, such as Iranian students. Addressing these gaps in the literature can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of migration dynamics and guide policy measures targeted at meeting the needs and aspirations of varied migrant communities. Understanding the influential factors in the migration decision-making of Iranian students and the role of social media in influencing Iranian students' migration decisions, as investigated in this study, is critical for informing policies and interventions targeted at promoting international student mobility while also improving cross-cultural understanding and cooperation.

Chapter 4: Theoretical framework

4.1 Understanding the Dynamics of Migration Decision-Making

Migration decision-making is a process of making up one's mind whether, if, where, when, how, and with whom to relocate. It is an insightful phenomenon that aims at the evaluation of a multitude of elements like goals, competencies, knowledge, features, limitations, and uncertainties. People with backgrounds in different financial, social, and political settings are also affected by the actions of the state and others, which could be very motivating for people to leave their places. Discerning a destination of migration is an unending and flexible process that might be consequently reexamined and vice versa in every migration round. In such a repetitive manner, it works (Kennan & Walker, 2013). The migration activities and decisions made on migrants and their families will influence both the security and welfare of both countries of origin and destination always as a result of that.

All migration decisions have one thing in common: they are made in the face of extreme ambiguity about the possibility and possible consequences of different options (Williams and Baláž, 2012). Since Knight (1921), literature has frequently distinguished between two types of uncertainty: measurable risk and unmeasurable uncertainty, the latter of which is more challenging to define and control. This can also result in circumstances of ambiguity under risk

or ignorance under uncertainty appropriate when combined with a lack of understanding about alternatives and outcomes (Shaw et al., 2010). Four important aspects of the decision-making process related to migration are the goals of potential migrants at the beginning of the process, which is mediated by the information available and used, the duration of the decisions, and the locus of control, or the person who makes the decisions.

As Figure 4.1 shows by drawing a four-dimensional migration choice space, these four components are conceptually distinct. Certain factors interact with one another while making decisions in real life. For instance, longer planning horizons are made possible by internal locus of control and more knowledge (Czaika et al., 2021).

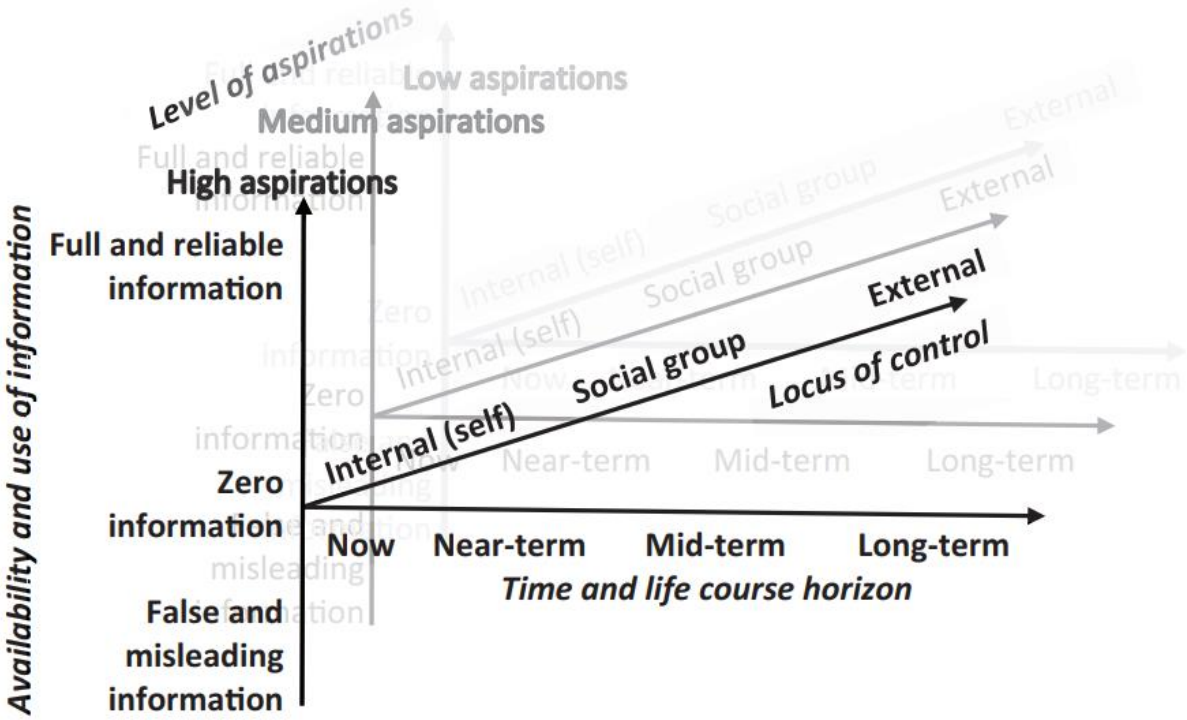


Figure 4.1: A Key Dimension of Migration Choice
Source: Czaika et al., 2021

A multitude of elements, including personal traits, life objectives, social networks, political situations, economic possibilities, and environmental considerations, shape and impact migration ambitions. The intents or wishes to move are known as migration aspirations, and they may be either good or negative depending on whether the person views migration as a need or an opportunity. Aspirations related to migration are dynamic and subject to change when new facts or circumstances arise (Carling, 2014). Aspirations to migrate are also not

uniform or universal; rather, they might differ among people, communities, and environments. Aspirations for migration are the initial and most important stage in the decision-making process because they influence the information-gathering, planning, and implementation phases that follow. Individuals look for and assess information on migration alternatives utilizing heuristics and cognitive norms. Media, social networks, friends, family, recruiters, and government sources provide information. Reliability varies, affecting consistency and accuracy (Czaika et al., 2021). Cognitive biases, like confirmation bias, influence perception. Information search and evaluation are vital in shaping migration decisions by determining the quantity and quality of alternatives, influencing expectations, and guiding preferences (De Hass et al., 2021). Individuals plan migrations based on preferences, resources, time, opportunities, risks, and uncertainties. The type of migration (voluntary/forced, regular/irregular, temporary/permanent, individual/collective) influences planning and timing. External events (crises, conflicts, catastrophes, policy changes) can create migration windows. Emotional factors (optimism, pessimism, fear, hope) impact planning. Planning and timing are critical in migration decision-making, affecting viability, desirability, and plan execution (Seiger et al., 2020).

4.2 Overview of theories

This study implements a multifaceted theoretical framework integrating existing theories about social media, international student mobility, and decision-making processes. Recognizing social media's transformative role in influencing migration narratives and experiences, this framework offers a comprehensive lens through which to explore the subtle dynamics that shape migration patterns and decision-making behaviors. In the following subsections, I describe three major theoretical perspectives that provide useful insights into the multifaceted behavior of migration choices: lifestyle theory, neoclassical economic theory, and social network theory. Each theoretical perspective provides a unique insight into the diverse factors underlying people’s motivations, restraints, and the variety of factors influencing the decision to migrate. Here is a brief overview of the theories mentioned.

4.2.1 Neoclassical Economic Migration

The neoclassical model focuses on the individual’s decision to move based on a comparison of the benefits and costs of moving relative to staying (Orrenius & Zavodny, 2015). In this scheme, individual rational actors decide to migrate because a cost-benefit calculation leads them to expect a positive net return, usually monetary, from movement. International migration

is conceptualized as a form of investment in human capital. People choose to move to where they can be most productive, given their skills (Massey et al., 1993). International migration has always been sensitive to the business cycle. While long-run trends in migration are influenced by economic and demographic fundamentals, short-run movements are driven by the state of labor markets in both host and sending countries (Williamson, 2015). Neoclassical economic theory optimizes the rational choice of migration by analyzing and making decisions based on psychological cost-benefit concepts (Kennan & Walker, 2013). As a result, people tend to migrate to regions with a higher income and more job opportunities for socioeconomic reasons. According to Kurekova (2011), migration results from actual wage differentials across markets or countries that emerge from heterogeneous degrees of labor market tightness. According to this theory, migration is driven by geographic differences in labor supply and demand and the resulting differentials in wages between labor-rich versus capital-rich countries. The central argument of the neoclassical approach thus concentrates on wages.

In conclusion, the neoclassical economic migration theory emphasizes rational decision-making with considerations for costs and benefits, especially that of income differentials and job opportunities between regions or countries. It explains that people migrate to areas that pay them higher wages and increase their job opportunities, guided by economic factors and market dynamics. Knowing and understanding these concepts are crucial in understanding the economic factors influencing decisions to migrate. Specifically, considering this study, the correlation of these factors with the influence of social media gives insight into the complex contributors influencing people's migration.

4.2.2 Lifestyle Migration

The term "lifestyle migration" describes a range of circumstances and motivations that is broader than employment (Knowles & Harper, 2009). Lifestyle migration is an approach that seeks to understand the social imaginaries and subjective accounts that migrants narrate of their own migration desires and post-migration practices (McGarrigle, 2022). It focuses on the role of personal lifestyle preferences, desires, and subjective well-being based on which people make conscious and subconscious choices to engage in migration. Our usage of lifestyle migration is not intended to flatten migration motives to a single dimension. On the contrary, it acknowledges the shifting multiplicity of motives and adds something we consider more important: the operationalization of motives in concrete settlement practices. Our use of

lifestyle migration also acknowledges the inseparability of economic factors like income, and the quality of life it supports (Knowles & Harper, 2009).

Thus, the theory describes the concept of quality-of-life considerations, which significantly shape people's decision-making. Lifestyle theory also emphasizes the individual's values and belief systems, promoting individual agency in people's decisions to migrate. Recognizing the diversity of factors that influence migration decisions, this perspective emphasizes the importance of viewing migration as a multi-level phenomenon. By discussing lifestyle migration theory in this paper, we wish to focus on the importance of personal aspirations and subjective well-being for the process of migration decision-making.

4.2.3 Social Network Theory

Social network theory focuses on the role of social relationships in transmitting information, channeling personal or media influence, and enabling attitudinal or behavioral change (Liu et al., 2017). Social Network theory implies that people migrate based on their support system of people and known resources, including trust and social connectivity. Social networks based on kinship, friendship, and community ties are central components in migration systems analysis. They mediate between individual actors and larger structural forces. They link sending and receiving countries (Boyd,1989). Therefore, human connectivity massively influences the forming of people's migration through tangible and intangible resources. Since the role of social media in facilitating people's decision to migrate, we link the impact of social media with the Social Network theory. Interactions within social networks make migration easier by reducing the costs and risks of moving. Social networks are commonly an important determinant of migration plans and the choice of destination (Haug, 2008).

According to Liu et al. (2017), Social Network Theory may be applied to the analysis of migration patterns within diaspora communities. In particular, network analysis methods assist researchers in identifying high-centrality nodes that operate as influencers due to their ability to share information and make decisions. These findings can illuminate the structure, dynamics, and interaction patterns that operate at the individual level. This level is the most suitable for understanding the drivers and mechanisms of migration decisions and the distribution of valuable resources in diaspora communities.

As a result, this perspective can help us better understand the impact of social networks and social media on the migration decisions of students. Regarding international student migration, this implies that students steer much of their information, advice, and support regarding studying abroad from their social networks such as family, friends, and their peers who have previously studied. These networks play a role in shaping the decision-making process by offering information concerning the study destination, academic programs, modes of living, and cultural integration. Additionally, the rise of social media has ignited the influences of these networks on prospective students, given that they can interact with other peers on the platform and source information about their specific study abroad experiences.

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Methodology Rationales

As Bijak, Czaika, and Prike (2021) mention the broad range of already existing empirical studies clearly demonstrates the potential of survey-based analyses to provide insight into the process of migration decision-making. In order to reflect the depth and nature of the migration decision-making process, this study adopts a quantitative survey-based design approach to explore the influence of social media on the migration decision-making process of Iranian students in Sweden. Quantitative methods are frequently utilized by social scientists to model human behavior and make predictions (Sharma, 2017). As discussed by Xiong (2022), it can be summarised from a considerable number of quantitative studies that objectivity, generalizability, and effectiveness are three remarkable characteristics of quantitative research methods.

The use of a quantitative approach for this study is supported by the fact that different research has been conducted to investigate both the role of social media in decision-making and various influential factors, such research was effectively conducted using a survey-based quantitative

approach. For example, a quantitative study was conducted by Liu and M. Saidi (2014) to explore the factors influencing students' application intention in the business school context. The effects of social media on decision-making processes were also studied. Another quantitative study was conducted by Sharma et al. (2020) to reveal priority factors of decision-making processes in higher education. The research by Komito (2011) illustrates how quantitative methods can be used to study the intersection of social media and migration. As discussed in the introduction, Komito's study, conducted among Polish and Filipino migrants in Ireland, used quantitative analysis to show that the use of social media supports the formation of transnational communities and bonding capital.

In addition to using a quantitative design research methodology, considering my role as an insider researcher, this study recognizes the importance of insider research methodologies in investigating migration decision-making processes. Insider researchers, as described by Unluer (2012) and Saidin (2016), have cultural or experiential parallels with the studied community, allowing them to provide unique perspectives and insights. Researchers can use their insider status to create rapport with participants, get access to previously unavailable social networks, and discern subtle subtleties in migrants' narratives.

5.1.1 Philosophy of the Research

According to Babones (2016), quantitative social science has long been identified with self-consciously positivist approaches to the philosophy, rhetoric, and methodology of research. Philosophically, this identification implies that quantitative social scientists assume that there exists a knowable objective reality that is represented reasonably well by the variables that are used in statistical analyses (and their relationships). In terms of epistemology, this study uses a positivist approach to investigate how social media influences Iranian students' migration decisions. According to 6 and Bellamy (2013), positivism's basic idea is that all knowledge comes from experience – that is, from what we observe, observation refers not only to visual observations but to the instruments we possess to extend and enhance them.

Furthermore, from an ontological standpoint, this study reflects a belief in the objective reality of social processes, including the impact of social media and migration decisions. The goal of positivism is to identify patterns and causal relationships by measuring and observing these phenomena in a systematic way. Positivism is adopted from the natural sciences and involves generating predictions in the form of hypotheses and then gathering data to test those hypotheses. This is, by definition, a deductive process as the researcher begins with a

generalized principle and then observes specific data to test that principle (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2021). As discussed by 6 and Bellamy (2013), the aim of deductive research is to test a statement that is formulated before we create or collect any data. The specification of the data to be collected, and the procedure to be followed in analyzing them, is derived from that statement. As a result, the study starts with some assumptions about how social media influences Iranian students' decisions to migrate to use a deductive approach. These ideas serve as a basis for the development of hypotheses, which are subsequently put to the test with quantitative data gathered via an instrumented survey. Following a positivist paradigm, the study aims to identify relationships between social media use and migration decisions as well as empirical patterns. It is predicated on the idea that information regarding these events may be obtained by systematic observation and measurement, which will advance our understanding of the variables influencing Iranian students' decisions to immigrate to Sweden.

However, despite the embrace of the positive paradigm, the study is aware of the limitations associated with this approach. As mentioned by Xiong (2022), quantitative researchers fail to develop a more profound understanding of underlying meanings and explanations involved in participants' viewpoints. Since quantitative researchers serve as detached observers and are unlikely to establish intimate relationships with participants engaged in the research, it would be of tremendous difficulty to probe into the phenomena within its natural settings merely by using scientific methods. This is the case as far as migration decisions are influenced by the socio-cultural context that cannot be captured with the help of quantitative approaches. To get beyond this restriction, the study uses open-ended questions in its survey instrument that allow participants to complement the quantitative data with their personal reflections. In such a way, both types of data enrich each other allowing the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the question under investigation.

Ultimately, the value of the study lies in its potential to fill the gap in the literature on the migration decision-making process of Iranian students, which can contribute to our overall knowledge of international students' migration. Although the cause of migration has been extensively studied and debated, little empirical research has examined the specific factors behind Iranian students' motivations. Moreover, the findings provide implications for academic institutions, which aim to attract a diverse student population. International students play a major role in the country's economy, and schools and universities can use this information to develop policies and strategies.

5.2 Material and Data Collection

The primary data collection method is a survey comprising both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. By employing a survey-based data collection method I aimed to obtain quantitative data through multiple questions results, and supplementary qualitative data through open-ended questions results. The survey was distributed among a population of Iranian students residing and studying in Sweden, facilitated through a Telegram group consisting of approximately 360 members. The survey's purpose is to collect as many responses as possible from Iranian students in Sweden. However, it should be mentioned that data are rarely collected from an entire population because it often is not possible or is too costly (Johnson et al., 2000).

5.2.1 Survey Design

My study is based on a self-administered web-based survey. The possibility to collect data on web surveys has eliminated the need to transcribe the responses (Neuert, et al., 2021). According to Cohen et al. (2018), paper-based surveys are no longer the predominant mode of conducting surveys and are being replaced by Internet surveys, which offer better exportability, more convenience, easier access, and less human error. Informed by Marshall and Rossman (2016), the researcher took account of the ethical issues regarding conducting research in online communities. The researcher also took account of the points outlined in Redline et al. (2003) in administrating the online questionnaire to guarantee less biased conclusions that are grounded in evidence.

This paper's survey is single-round which is conducted once, as a cross-sectional survey, with one instance of data collection from each respondent (Carling & Mjelva, 2021). The survey was made in Google Forms and the link was shared with Iranian students in a Telegram group. The link was active to participate between 28/03/2024 and 10/04/2024. Due to the limitation of time, I had to deactivate the survey link and stop participation after two weeks; however, extending the duration may have allowed for the collection of more data.

I designed the survey in 4 sections and a total of 15 questions consisting of personal information, multiple questions, and open-ended questions (the survey form and link are available in Appendix. 1). For close-ended (multiple choice) questions participants rated the level of importance as “Not Important”, “Slightly Important”, “Moderately Important”, “Important” and “Very Important”. Additionally, participants had the ability to specify additional ideas using the "other" option.

To gain more insight from participants, I used a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions in my survey design. According to experts, there are various rationales for doing so:

According to Carling and Mjelva (2021), the survey must be of a quantitative nature, meaning that it must be structured with pre-formulated, standardized questions. On the other hand, Close-ended questions limit the respondent to the set of alternatives being offered, while open-ended questions allow the respondent to express an opinion without being influenced by the researcher (Reja, et al., 2003). Giving respondents the option of submitting a comment demonstrates the respect they deserve for taking the time to complete the survey.

In recent years, the value of open-ended questions has been rediscovered in survey research as there are various research situations where open-ended questions can provide crucial information that closed-ended questions cannot deliver (Neuert, et al., 2021). According to Neuert, et al. (2021), Conducting a survey with both close-ended and open-ended questions can benefit us in many ways, including understanding reasons for reluctance or refusal; testing methodological theories and hypotheses; encouraging more truthful answers; providing an opportunity for feedback; and serving as an indicator of response quality.

Considering the population and survey participants of my study demonstrates the appropriateness of such a survey for this topic, as mentioned by Reja, et al. (2003), open-ended questions can be useful for surveys that are targeting a small group of people because there is no need for complex statistical analysis and the qualitative nature of the questions will give you more valuable input from each respondent. The rule here is the group must be small enough for the surveyor to be able to read each unique response and reflect on the information provided.

Researchers make use of open-ended questions in surveys because they allow respondents to report facts, behaviors, or attitudes without being restricted to a fixed set of answer choices (Schmidt, Gummer & Roßmann, 2020). Open-ended questions can produce a much more diverse set of answers compared to closed-ended questions, Open-ended questions have been

shown to elucidate critical comments that cannot be obtained using purely quantitative surveys (Riiskjær et al., 2012).

The survey instrument used in this study was carefully created to analyze the migration decisions of Iranian students studying in Sweden, with a particular emphasis on the use of social media. The survey was divided into four sections: obtaining demographic information, identifying influential variables in migration decisions, examining the influence of social media, and exploring reasons for choosing Sweden as a study location. To guarantee clarity and comprehensiveness, the survey questions were presented in both English and Persian, responding to the respondents' linguistic preferences.

To ensure that the research objectives of my paper were aligned well with the data acquired through the survey instrument, I divided the survey into sections that corresponded to the sub-questions defined in my thesis. This planned categorization enabled a more concentrated approach to data collecting, allowing for a methodical examination of each area under consideration. By organizing the survey in this manner, I hoped to improve the coherence and effectiveness of the research instrument, guaranteeing that the data collected would directly contribute to answering the specific research questions mentioned in my paper. Here are the categories:

1. **Demographic Information**

The purpose of this section was to collect basic demographic data such as age, gender, field of study, and relevant facts about the participants' migration experiences, such as the year they began studying in Sweden and whether they migrated alone or with family.

2. **Influential elements in Immigration Decisions**

Participants were asked to identify the elements that influenced their decision to study abroad, which ranged from economic concerns and political instability in Iran to educational possibilities and recommendations from friends and family. The replies were classified according to their perceived importance, offering insight into the various levels of influence exerted by each factor.

3. **The Impact of Social Media on Migration Decisions**

This section investigated the participants' use of social media platforms to collect information about studying in Sweden and evaluated the extent to which social media influenced their migration decisions. Participants were also asked to describe the precise ways in which social

media influenced their decision-making process, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the role of digital platforms in determining migration choices.

4. Reasons for Choosing Sweden as a Study Destination

Participants were asked to identify the primary reasons they chose Sweden as a study destination, which included factors such as safety and security, educational quality, language study programmes, the standard of living, cultural diversity, and visa acquisition ease. The comments provide insights into the perceived benefits of studying in Sweden over other alternative destinations.

5.2.2 Survey Implementation and Participant Recruitment

My study survey employs a non-probability sampling method, those in which the probability that a subject is selected is unknown (Acharya et al., 2013). The selection of the participants was facilitated via convenience sampling, the sample was chosen based on the convenience of the investigator. Often the respondents are selected because they are at the right place at the right time (ibid). It should be noted that the applicability of the findings to other contexts is negligible since a convenience sampling technique was adopted to collect the data.

To ensure clarity and efficacy, the survey was pilot-tested with a small number of participants before being sent. The feedback from this pilot test was thoroughly analyzed, and again small changes were made to improve the survey instrument. These changes were intended to improve the clarity and comprehensibility of the survey questions. I made sure that it met the criteria outlined by Taherdoost (2016), which included evaluating the questionnaire's appearance in terms of feasibility, readability, consistency of style and formatting, and language clarity.

Following the pilot test, the finalized survey was shared with the Iranian students in that Telegram group. Participants were invited to contribute to the study, which seeks to evaluate the impact of social media on the migration decision-making process of Iranian students in Sweden.

The study's objective was clearly described in the initial message to the group, emphasizing the importance of participants' insights in understanding the factors driving migration decisions. Furthermore, I emphasized the importance of responding to open-ended questions to provide depth and credibility to the research. Participants were promised that their replies would be kept anonymous and used solely for research reasons. Additionally, participants were

urged to contact us if they had any questions or issues about the survey. This open invitation to communicate was intended to create transparency and trust among participants.

To recruit volunteers for the study, participants were selected via a Telegram channel exclusively for Iranian students in Sweden. Individuals who could offer proof of enrolment in academic programs in Sweden, such as a study certificate or other papers, were granted access to the group. This criterion verified that all respondents were Iranian students studying in Sweden, increasing the reliability of the data collected. Furthermore, to access the survey and participate in the survey, respondents had to sign in to their Google accounts. This additional step helps to reduce the danger of duplicate responses. The survey was answered by 107 people in total. The total number of answers varied for each question since not every participant responded to every closed-ended and open-ended question. However, it should be noted that in each section of the survey, open-ended questions were answered by many of the respondents, most of which supported and clarified their multiple selections of closed-ended questions. It added more reliability to their close-ended question' choices.

Here is the overall demographic information about the participants which was obtained from the first part of the survey: (Demographic plots are available in Appendix. 2)

The ages of the participants ranged between 22 and 56 years. Most of the participants fell in the age range of 30 to 39. This indicates a substantial portion of young adults hunting for academic opportunities. However, it is also noticeable that people in their 20s and early 40s are also represented significantly; in other words, there are people at all stages of life who are eager to develop their skills and knowledge academically or professionally. There were few instances in their early 20s and mid-fifties, and these may be considered the extremes.

The gender distribution among the prospective students is largely equal, with approximately 59.4% of females and 40.6% of males. As shown, the population represents both genders fairly, emphasizing diversity in the gender factor. Due to the close percentage margin, the opportunities presented by the study processes in Sweden are attractive to both males and females representing numerous distributed populations. Achieving such a balance is necessary because it creates an environment that is inclusive and supportive.

Considering the starting year of studies, a substantial number of participants started from the year 2021 onwards, an indication of a particular trend. In the temporary setting, 2022 had the largest number of starting years, being the year 39.6% of the individuals started the academic journey in Sweden.

Furthermore, the survey results revealed that 48% of people decided to move to Sweden alone, which can indicate a trend decision for people who aim to catch opportunities in the city. On the other hand, 52% of people moved with their families, which shows the importance of family support and the decision to move all together among a group of students. Hence, it can show the difference in individual and family opportunities.

5.3 Data Analysis

The survey results were analyzed to provide a full insight into the migration decision-making process among Iranian students in Sweden. After gathering survey responses, quantitative data was obtained from closed-ended and multiple-choice questions. Data has been imported to an Excel spreadsheet for manual analysis. Excel functions were used to produce descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage. Graphs and plots were created using both Excel and Rstudio. The findings were interpreted and published in the paper. The data was thoroughly examined before analysis to exclude any irrelevant or incomplete responses.

5.3.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

Structured content analysis was applied to qualitative data obtained from open-ended responses. Content analysis entailed carefully organizing and categorizing replies based on established topics or categories, which corresponded to the structured nature of the survey questions. Frequency and percentage calculations were performed for demographic data such as age, gender, academic background, and length of stay in Sweden. This gave a summary of the sample's characteristics. The responses to closed-ended questions were analyzed to determine the most common migration factors, the role of social media, and the reasons for choosing Sweden. This involved determining the frequency and proportion of each factor. To discover any significant differences in migratory determinants, comparisons were done between different demographic categories (for example, gender and age groups).

5.3.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

Initially, the open-ended replies were analyzed to detect common themes or concepts about migration motivations, social media influence, and reasons for choosing Sweden as a research destination. These subjects were predefined using the themes provided in the survey questions, guaranteeing consistency and compatibility with the research objectives. Codes were then assigned to text parts that matched each specified theme or category. These codes reflected the

substance of the replies within each topic area, allowing for a systematic organization of qualitative data. Qualitative insights were employed to supplement quantitative results. For example, if a substantial percentage of respondents identified social media as a crucial reason, qualitative data provided specific explanations and personal tales that contributed to a better understanding of the trend. By matching the qualitative analysis to the structured character of the survey questions, consistency was maintained throughout the analysis process, ensuring that the qualitative insights were directly relevant to the study objectives.

5.3.3 Integration and Triangulation

The quantitative and qualitative findings were combined to provide a thorough picture of the factors influencing migration decisions among Iranian students. By triangulating the findings from both data sources, a comprehensive understanding of the research topic emerges.

This entailed discovering convergent or divergent trends in the quantitative and qualitative data. For example, if a large number of respondents numerically stated economic concerns as the key cause, qualitative replies were investigated to see if specific personal tales supported this trend. This integration allowed for a more in-depth investigation of the research topics and a better overall grasp of the findings. Discrepancies between quantitative and qualitative data were investigated to create a full picture of the factors influencing migration decisions.

5.3.4 Theoretical Framework and Answering Research Questions

In the last step, findings were utilized for answering research questions using theories and literature. Lifestyle theory, neoclassical economic theory, and social network theory served as the theoretical framework for the entire data analysis process. By analyzing survey data through the lens of these theoretical frameworks and existing literature, I intended to answer sub-questions and the main question of the paper.

5.4 Ensuring Trustworthiness

Several efficient methods were employed throughout the research process to ensure the reliability and credibility of the study findings, including multiple-choice and open-ended survey questions. This methodological diversity enhanced data triangulation, the combination of two or more data sources, investigators, methodologic approaches, theoretical perspectives, or analytical methods within the same study (Thurmond, 2001), allowing for the validation of results from multiple perspectives. The study analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data to

gain a better understanding of the migration decision-making process among Iranian students in Sweden. The pilot testing process, as well as the following refining of the survey instrument to improve clarity and comprehensibility, show a commitment to assuring the reliability and validity of the obtained data.

The description of participant recruitment efforts, such as membership in a Telegram channel exclusively for Iranian students in Sweden, as well as the verification of participants' enrolment status with a study certificate, all contributed to the reliability of the responses received.

Out of the 107 participants surveyed, a large majority actively participated in the open-ended prompts in all sections. Noteworthy is the fact that a significant number of participants shared qualitative insights in each of the three sections, with 60, 48, and 68 responses respectively. This consistent and substantial engagement indicates a dependable dataset, reflecting thoughtful responses rather than random ones. Moreover, the strong response rates to the open-ended questions boosted the credibility of the research findings, showing that participants deemed them relevant and were willing to provide detailed feedback. Therefore, the active involvement in the open-ended sections bolsters the reliability and validity of the research results, supporting the study's conclusions.

5.5 Ethical Considerations

Before students began participating, they were provided explicit information about the study's objective, procedures, and potential dangers. All participants gave informed consent and indicated their free agreement to participate in the study. To grant "informed" consent, all research volunteers must first give their permission to participate in a study and be given relevant information. This implies that you have provided your research participants with all of the necessary information to make an "informed" decision about participating in your study. (Siegle, 2023). Given the importance of migratory decisions, moral considerations are critical. Researchers must employ an "ethical radar" before, during, and after their fieldwork (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2020). I emphasized that the survey participants' information would stay anonymous even if I mentioned their quotes in this study and that their information would be used exclusively for this study and not for any other purpose.

5.6 Delimitations

This study explores Iranian students in Sweden and how social media influences their migration decisions. While acknowledging the greater diaspora of Iranian students globally (Naghdi, 2010), this study enables a more focused investigation within a specific setting. Sweden, with its reputation for humanitarian concerns, low population, and developing economy, has made this country a popular destination for Iranians (Naghdi, 2010). It provides a suitable context for this inquiry. The following are the criteria for inclusion:

- The study is delimited to Iranian students enrolling at Swedish universities.
- All of the participants have already made their migration decisions and are residing in Sweden.
- The study's duration is confined to recent years (2018-2024), recognizing the rapid evolution of social media platforms and their impact on decision-making processes.

By limiting the timeframe, the study hopes to capture contemporary effects, ensuring that the findings are relevant and applicable to the current cohort of Iranian students considering or undertaking migration to Sweden.

5.7 Addressing Potential Biases

Regarding certain sections of the open-ended questions that some participants responded to in Persian, I translated the portions that I intended to discuss in my chapter on the results. therefore, Language bias (Stern & Kleijnen, 2020) can occur due to differences in language proficiency, affecting the clarity of survey questions responses. As an insider researcher, my perspective helped minimize bias because we share the same language and culture. Furthermore, recall bias is a concern because participants may not accurately remember or represent previous decisions. Finally, selection bias may exist within the Telegram group, with more active or willing members skewing the dataset.

Chapter6: Results

The following chapter presents and titles results based on the section from the survey. As mentioned earlier data was imported to an Excel spreadsheet for manual analysis. Excel functions were used to produce descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage.

6.1 Demographic information

Details about demographic information were discussed earlier in the methodology chapter (sub-section 5.2.2), and demographic graphs are available in Appendix 2.

6.2 Influential Factors in Migration Decisions

6.2.1 Factors Influencing the Decision to Study Overseas

“Please select all factors that influenced your choice to study overseas.”

Participants rated the level of importance of influential factors as “Not Important”, “Slightly Important”, “Moderately Important”, “Important”, or “Very Important” as shown below:

Economic reasons	Count
Very Important	62
Important	26
Moderately Important	9
Slightly Important	2
Not Important	2

Political and Social Instability in Iran	Count
Very Important	69
Important	24
Moderately Important	6
Slightly Important	1
Not Important	0

Education	Count
Very Important	35
Important	33
Moderately Important	15
Slightly Important	8
Not Important	4

Recommendations from Friends or Family	Count
Very Important	25
Important	23
Moderately Important	22
Slightly Important	17
Not Important	8

Information from Social Media	Count
Very Important	31
Important	23
Moderately Important	15
Slightly Important	14
Not Important	10

Desire for a Better Quality of Life	Count
Very Important	83
Important	17
Moderately Important	3
Slightly Important	0
Not Important	0

Seeking Personal or Academic Freedom	Count
Very Important	39
Important	29
Moderately Important	23
Slightly Important	4
Not Important	0

Safety and Security Concerns in Iran	Count
Very Important	49
Important	36
Moderately Important	8
Slightly Important	4
Not Important	0

Job Opportunities After Graduation	Count
Very Important	56
Important	22
Moderately Important	10
Slightly Important	7
Not Important	0

Climate/Environment	Count
Very Important	15
Important	16
Moderately Important	25
Slightly Important	23
Not Important	17

Figure 6.1: Statistics of Influential Factors in Migration Decisions

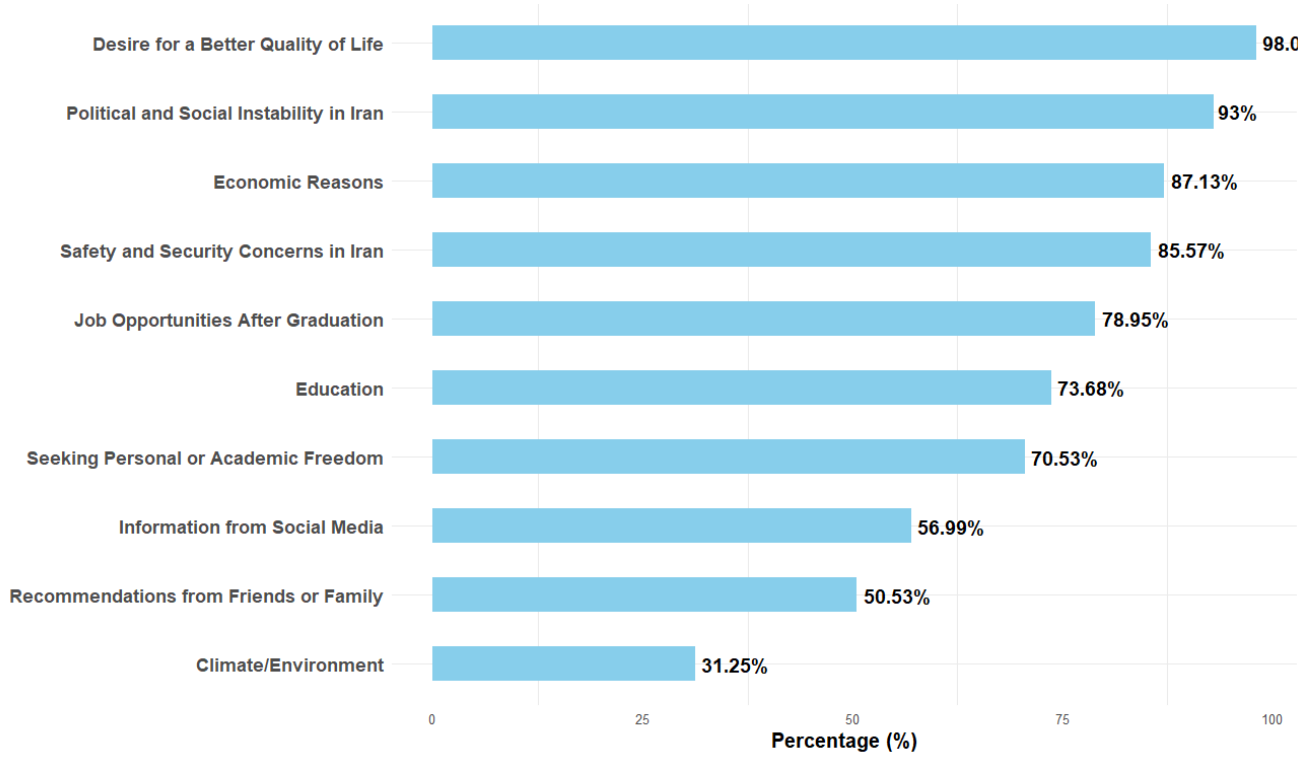


Figure 6.2: Percentage of Students Considering Influential Factors Important or Very Important in Migration Decisions

The total number of answers varies in every factor, and it is because participants were told that they can skip any question they prefer not to answer, as a result, not every participant responded to every question.

One of the key motivating factors for Iranian students to pursue education abroad is primarily economic. The results indicate that almost all respondents chose the “Very Important” option, which implies that they consider financial aspects when choosing the country for migration based on education. both respondents who migrated alone and those who migrated with family attributed a similar level of importance to economic reasons for their migration. This is evident from the data provided, where many respondents in both groups selected "Very Important" as the level of importance for economic reasons.

It can be concluded that economic stability and opportunity are significant factors affecting educational migration. At the same time, the instability of the sociopolitical system is also indicated as a significant motivating factor for leaving Iran. The predominance of the “Very

Important" option indicates that the majority of respondents from all categories consider the political and social systems in their homeland as a reason for leaving. Thus, the sociopolitical problem has relevance in educational migration.

Also, many respondents indicated the high importance of the quality of life factor and chose the "Very Important" option. This means that when choosing a country to move abroad, Iranian students are guided by the standard of living.

Demanding academic and personal freedom was reflected in the "Important" and "Very Important" options. Thus, the reason for studying abroad is largely related to the desire to achieve greater independence in academic and personal matters. Regarding academic and personal freedom from a gender perspective, females have a higher count (33) compared to males (16) for "Very Important".

The perceived general lack of security in Iran is also a significant factor influencing Iranian students to move on. The option "Very Important" is chosen by many and is associated with an external factor of insecurity, which is not widespread in Iran.

Finally, many Iranian students do not choose "Very Important" but choose "Very Important" for the possibility of finding a job after completing their studies. Thus, in addition to purely economic considerations, professional factors also somewhat motivate Iranians to study abroad. Education, recommendations from friends or relatives, social networks, and climate/ environmental conditions in the country of a destination are, in turn, of moderate importance.

Other Influential Factors

Several other influential factors (15) were cited by respondents in addition to those provided in the previous question. These factors include:

Less corruption in academia and job recruitment, Preparing the situation for children to live and grow in better circumstances as the next generation, Living in a peaceful and lawful society far from Iran, Availability of scholarships or financial aid specifically for international students, Gender inequality, Peace, Women's rights issues in Iran, Healthcare system and the quality of medicines, Experience of the international environment, A better and safer future for my children.

It may be necessary to consider the following additional options, as they offer insights into different aspects of the attitudes, motivations, and other factors that may influence Iranian students' decision to study abroad. The elements demonstrate a set of various individual, social, and other considerations not directly included in the presented choices.

6.2.2 Personal Reflections and Motivations for Studying Overseas

"Please share any personal reflections, experiences, specific challenges, or motivations that influenced your decision to study overseas."

60 of participants answered open-ended question of influential factors section, here are some highlights:

Economic Stability and Career Prospects

Economic considerations also played a significant role in the decision of most participants to study in aborad. They noted the importance of stable economy and employment opportunities compared to their home countries. People value the ability to take care of their own and their family's economic security in the long term and make plans without the influence of economic turmoil. As some of them put it:

"Since my homeland suffers from an ailing economy, I find it challenging to make long-term plans for my uncertain future, both money- and career-wise."

"Economic factors and the unstable political climate in Iran strongly influenced my decision to pursue education abroad."

Diverse Opportunities and Quality of Life

Additionally, many participants were driven by the promising opportunity to choose between various alternatives. They were attracted to studying advanced education programs, job prospects upon graduation, and overall quality of life anywhere culture was more open, and humans' right emphasis was stronger. One of them also stated:

"I needed stable life and job opportunities in my own field of study, in Iran I was all the time worried about the economy and political and social prbolems, I needed a stable life with less tress."

Desire for Freedom and Peace

A number of participants expressed a strong desire for the feeling of personal and intellectual freedom, especially against the background of the restrictive political and social environment in Iran. The potential to create a peaceful and safe living for themselves and their families and especially for children's upbringing was very appealing to the two participants:

"Having a sense of freedom was a big concern for me, and I wanted my son to grow in a more peaceful situation with a better education."

"Calm environment and a sense of social respect, respect for individual and social rights, freedom of expression and freedom of choice."

Escape from Political and Social Challenges

Iran's political and social situation, defined by instability and challenges such as gender discrimination and corruption, fueled many of the participants' desire to get an education abroad so as to advance personally. The participants said,

"The political and social situation in Iran was becoming increasingly challenging, and I saw studying abroad as an opportunity for personal growth and academic advancement."

Another participant highlighted,

"Gender inequality in Iran was very annoying for me and made me uncomfortable to live and study there."

A former lawyer said:

"Studying Law back in Iran and facing many injustices was one of my main factors to leave my country and study in another country, because if you want to be a lawyer you should accept a country's laws and that was impossible for me to work for justice and obey that regime's anti-justice laws specially about Women and kids."

Opportunities for Academic and Professional Growth

Participants also noted educational and professional opportunities overseas, primarily where knowledge had to be improved or when there was a need to update their skills. They identified the high quality of education and professional competence: A participant explained:

"To study UX design needed more up-to-date knowledge and it was important to be able to work in a country to have job opportunities for this field. And in Iran as a woman, I didn't feel free to live and work, specifically as an artist."

Influence of Recommendations

Recommendations from friends and family members who have had experiences studying abroad had quite the influence on the decisions of the participants. One participant said:

"My brother encouraged me to apply for studying"

"In my personal experience, the advice of relatives was very effective."

This clearly shows the importance of personal relationships and recommendations when making decisions.

6.3 Influence of Social Media on Migration Decisions

6.3.1 Social media used by international students

"Which social media platforms did you use to gather information about studying abroad?"

Participants rated the level of importance of social media platforms as "Not Important", "Slightly Important", "Moderately Important", "Important", "Very Important" as shown below:

Facebook	Count
Very Important	3
Important	8
Moderately Important	4
Slightly Important	19
Not Important	52

Instagram	Count
Very Important	35
Important	23
Moderately Important	20
Slightly Important	6
Not Important	8

Twitter	Count
Very Important	0
Important	10
Moderately Important	7
Slightly Important	13
Not Important	48

LinkedIn	Count
Very Important	16
Important	9
Moderately Important	15
Slightly Important	26
Not Important	21

Telegram	Count
Very Important	31
Important	32
Moderately Important	21
Slightly Important	7
Not Important	8

WhatsApp	Count
Very Important	10
Important	17
Moderately Important	28
Slightly Important	10
Not Important	21

Figure 6.3: Statistics of Social Media Platforms used in Migration Decisions

Here is the combo chart comparing the different platforms:

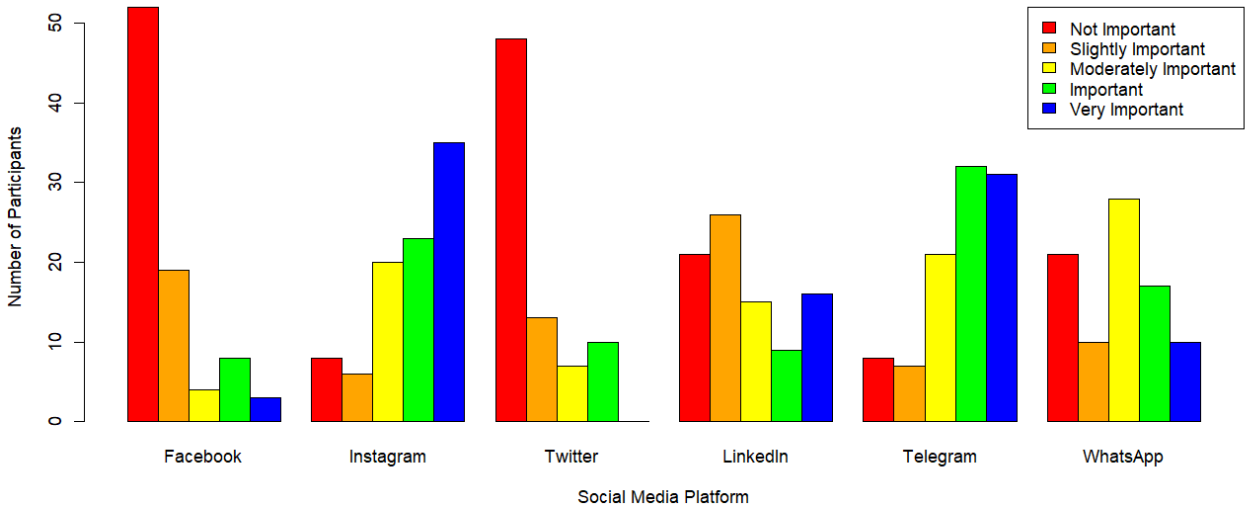


Figure 6.4: Social Media Platforms' Comparison for Migration Decisions

The analysis reveals that in terms of influence, Telegram was the most crucial platform studied. A significant number of respondents perceived it as “Very Important” and “Important” in their decisions.

Instagram is also among the central platforms, where the majority indicated that it was “Very Important” and “Important.” This implies that Instagram provides Iranian students with information about studying overseas, but the levels of this information’s importance vary across the respondents.

WhatsApp occupies a median position, as most of the respondents considered it “Moderately Important” and “Important” in their decisions.

On the other side, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn were almost unimportant. While these specific social media platforms were used by some respondents, the remainder found them to be “Not Important” and “Slightly Important” when it comes to learning about studying overseas. In general, our analysis suggests that Iranian students are using social media to learn from various platforms about studying abroad, with Telegram and Instagram being the most popular sites.

Other platforms

As noted by 9 participants among the “Other” platforms, **YouTube** was identified as a significant platform for getting information about studying overseas. Additionally, one person indicated **Reddit** as a significant platform.

6.3.2 Perceived Influence of Social Media on Migration Decisions

Regarding the survey question “To what extent do you believe social media influenced your decision to study overseas?”,

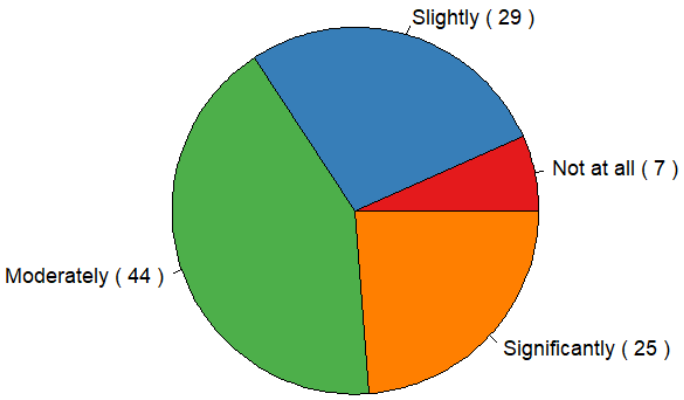


Figure 6.5: The extent of Social Media's influence on Migration Decisions

The data show that social media has various degrees of influence on the decision-making processes of Iranian students studying overseas. A considerable proportion (25 replies) indicated "significant" influence, implying that social media supplied useful information for their migration decision. Furthermore, a large number (44 replies) mentioned "Moderate" influence, showing that it was not the only determinant. Furthermore, 29 respondents mentioned "slight" influence, with a minority (7 responses) stating "no influence at all," citing other reasons.

6.3.3 Specific Ways Social Media Influenced Migration Decisions

"In what ways did social media influence your decision to study overseas?"

Participants rated the level of importance of influence of social media as "Not Important", "Slightly Important", "Moderately Important", "Important", "Very Important" as shown below:

Providing information about Study opportunities	Count
Very Important	45
Important	31
Moderately Important	9
Slightly Important	7
Not Important	3

Providing information about Student life	Count
Very Important	39
Important	33
Moderately Important	10
Slightly Important	13
Not Important	2

Inspiring motivation to study in Sweden	Count
Very Important	29
Important	27
Moderately Important	23
Slightly Important	12
Not Important	3

Language learning resources	Count
Very Important	12
Important	27
Moderately Important	24
Slightly Important	18
Not Important	10

Fostering Student connections	Count
Very Important	16
Important	18
Moderately Important	31
Slightly Important	18
Not Important	7

Facilitating cultural familiarity	Count
Very Important	14
Important	10
Moderately Important	35
Slightly Important	23
Not Important	7

Evoking emotional responses	Count
Very Important	8
Important	26
Moderately Important	27
Slightly Important	18
Not Important	12

Enabling networking opportunities	Count
Very Important	18
Important	29
Moderately Important	21
Slightly Important	13
Not Important	8

Universities' and institutions' Virtual events/webinars	Count
Very Important	12
Important	14
Moderately Important	19
Slightly Important	31
Not Important	17

Figure 6.6: Statistics of Social Media's influence on Migration Decisions

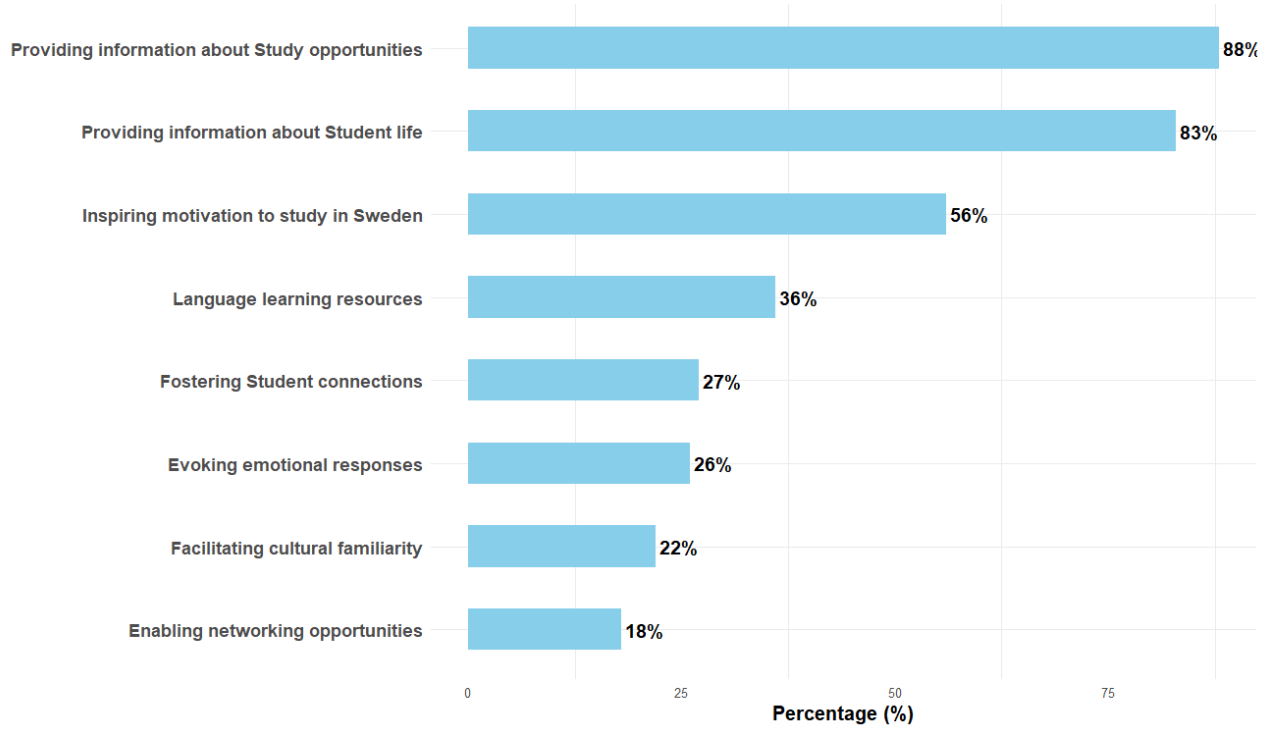


Figure 6.7: Percentage of Students Who Consider Social Media's influences Important or Very Important in Migration Decisions

Providing information about study opportunities and student life are rated as "Very Important" by many of respondents indicating that it plays an important influence in shaping their decision-making process. Similarly, social media can be used to motivate students to pursue their academic ambitions. While not universally seen as vital, a considerable proportion of participants place significant importance on this element.

However, opinions differ on the impact of social media in providing language learning resources. While some respondents evaluate it as "Very Important" or "Moderately Important," others believe it has less influence in their decision-making process. This variation shows that the role of language learning tools available on social media may be determined by individual preferences and needs.

Furthermore, social media enhances student connections and increases cultural familiarity. While they are widely regarded as significant, perspectives on their relevance differ. Some respondents score them highly, indicating that they have a significant impact on their decision-making process, whereas others regard them as less important. This disparity emphasises

students' various opinions and experiences using social media for cultural integration and networking reasons.

Similarly, social media's significance in evoking emotional responses and facilitating networking opportunities receives varied reviews. While some students see these factors as important influences, others believe they have little impact on their decision-making process. This shows that the emotional and networking aspects of social media use may differ in importance based on personal preferences and experiences.

Finally, social media makes it easier to attend virtual events and webinars hosted by colleges and institutions, which are critical for acquiring knowledge and participating with academic communities. Again, perspectives on its relevance differ, with some placing a high value on this feature while others place a lower value on it. This gap highlights the different ways in which students use social media platforms to access educational information and opportunities.

6.3.4 Personal Experiences with Social Media Influencing Migration Decisions

“Can you share any experiences of how social media played a significant role in your decision to move abroad?”

48 participants responded to the open-ended question, explaining how social media platforms have played different and major roles in influencing people's decisions to relocate. Here are some firsthand accounts offered by people about the impact of social media on their migration decisions:

Learning Opportunities Through Instagram

Some students began their trip by learning the language through LinkedIn and Instagram pages, which eventually lead them to discover study opportunities at Swedish universities and an expedited process for obtaining a student visa.

"I started Learning language and through that Instagram page I found out about Sweden universities and how fast is getting a student visa than other types of visas. Then I started my study abroad journey."

Information Gathering

Several individuals used social media platforms to learn about different aspects of living in Sweden, such as study opportunities, cultural norms, visa processes, and living situations.

"I connected to several people in LinkedIn before coming to Sweden. And asked them various questions about here."

Some participants mentioned despite using social media platforms for information gathering, most of their decision were influenced by other sources:

"While Facebook and Instagram provided some information about migration but most of my decision-making was based on personal research on google and recommendations from peers."

Another student mentioned:

"While I used social media, its impact on my decision was minimal. Most of my decision-making was based on personal research and recommendations."

Connecting with Former or Current Students

Some students used social media platforms to connect with other students interested in studying and living in these countries. Joining social media communities enabled individuals to connect with other students from their home country or with similar backgrounds, creating a sense of community and support during their migration and study abroad adventure.

"Through social media, I found former students from Sweden and Canada and asked them about studying and living in Sweden and Canada."

Another participant mentioned:

"Through Instagram and Telegram, I connected with current students who shared their experiences and insights about studying and living in Sweden. The posts and stories provided me a picture of the dynamic student life in Sweden."

Migration Agencies

Some students found migration agencies through a variety of sources, including suggestions from friends and acquaintances, internet advertisements, social media platforms, and direct visits to agency websites.

"I found information about my university through a migration agency group and after visiting their advertisement, I visited their website and page, then my parents called them and we started the migration and visa process."

Another student said:

"A friend in Sweden encouraged me to make migration decision, She sent me an Instagram page of an immigration company which was managed by a lawyer, I called them and they helped me with many information."

Telegram Groups

Telegram groups, particularly those that included Iranian students in Sweden, played an important role in providing support and sharing experiences, making the migration process easier for certain people.

"Telegram groups where Iranian students shared their information and experiences had the greatest impact on the ease of the process for me."

Another student mentioned:

"Through Instagram and later Telegram, I connected with current students who shared their experiences and insights about studying and living in Sweden. The posts and stories provided me a picture of the dynamic student life and cultural diversity in Sweden."

Motivation and Inspiration

Instagram and LinkedIn gave them an insight into Swedish student life, cultural diversity, and opportunity, enticing and driving them to pursue higher education overseas.

"When I saw the remarkable progress of my same level friends on LinkedIn and compared it with my limited conditions in Iran, I was motivated to emigrate."

Another one mentioned:

"Instagram provided glimpses into student life in Sweden, motivating me to explore educational opportunities in the country."

Accessing Information Despite Filtering

Despite filtering problems in Iran, people were able to obtain information via Instagram, which included posts and stories from students about their experiences studying and living abroad.

"In Iran, due to the filtering problem, mostly through Instagram, you can use the reports of people who have already had the experience of studying and living out of Iran, which was very effective in choosing this country."

Another participant mentioned:

"Social media posts specially Instagram and twitter reflected our country's issues, since the national tv and radio is fully controlled by the government and could not be trusted. So we used to refer to social media specially oversears independent accounts to get more information, since we had much problems the last couple of years the situation affected me in many ways to decide to leave Iran and study in another country."

6.4 Reasons for Choosing Sweden as a Study Destination

6.4.1 Primary Reasons for Selecting Sweden as a Study Destination

"What were the primary reasons for choosing Sweden as your study destination?

Participants rated the level of importance of reasons as "Not Important", "Slightly Important", "Moderately Important", "Important", "Very Important" as shown below:

Safety and Security	Count
Very Important	65
Important	24
Moderately Important	8
Slightly Important	2
Not Important	0

High-Quality Education	Count
Very Important	56
Important	24
Moderately Important	16
Slightly Important	3
Not Important	1

English Language Study Programmes	Count
Very Important	54
Important	28
Moderately Important	12
Slightly Important	4
Not Important	2

Desirable Standard of Living	Count
Very Important	60
Important	36
Moderately Important	7
Slightly Important	0
Not Important	0

Cultural Diversity	Count
Very Important	15
Important	19
Moderately Important	42
Slightly Important	13
Not Important	3

Ease of Obtaining a Visa/Residency Permit	Count
Very Important	30
Important	36
Moderately Important	16
Slightly Important	7
Not Important	5

Figure 6.8: Statistics of Reasons for Choosing Sweden as a Study Destination

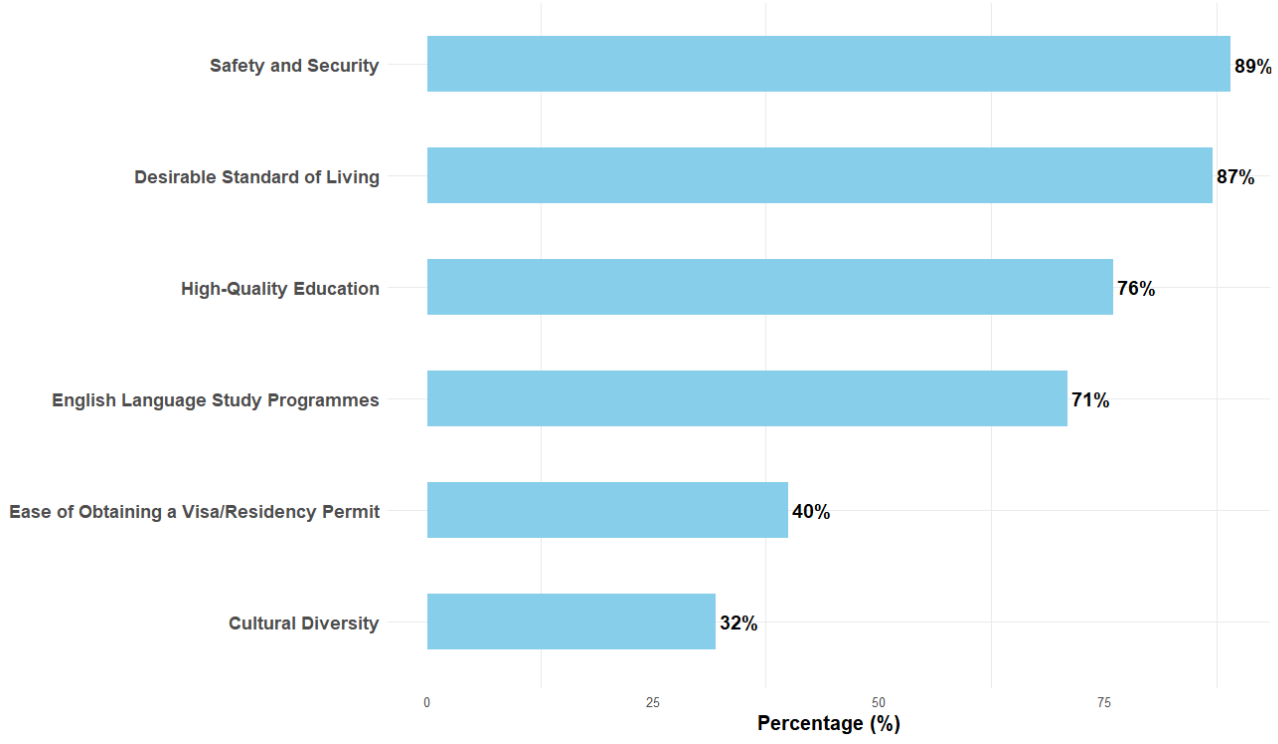


Figure 6.9: Percentage of Students Citing Various Reasons for Choosing Sweden as a Study Destination Very Important or Important

Safety and security appear as a key priority, with the vast majority of respondents rating it as "Very Important" or "Important," emphasising the critical importance of feeling safe in their chosen setting. This emphasis reflects participants' uniform agreement on the vital role safety and security play in shaping their study destination selection.

Similarly, high-quality education is highly valued, with most respondents evaluating it as "Very Important" or "Important." This highlights the appeal of Sweden's respected school system, which is noted for its excellence and innovation, demonstrating that participants widely recognise the country's educational superiority.

English language study programmes are likewise well-regarded, with a large proportion of respondents rating them as "Very Important" or "Important." This emphasises the accessibility of English-taught courses in Sweden for overseas students, highlighting the country's dedication to providing a diversified educational experience.

A desirable standard of living is another critical factor, with most respondents rating it as "Very Important" or "Important." This highlights the attraction of Sweden's quality of life, which includes healthcare and social assistance programmes, suggesting that participants agree on the importance of a decent living environment.

Respondents place varied degrees of significance on cultural variety, with a sizable majority describing it as "moderately important." While there are differing perspectives, the overall emphasis on cultural variety emphasizes its relevance in enriching the student experience and influencing their decision to study in Sweden.

Finally, the majority of respondents value the ease of getting a visa/residency permit, demonstrating the importance of administrative efficiency in aiding student relocation. However, there is some variation in perceptions, with a small number of respondents not finding it important, indicating participants' different priorities regarding the administrative aspects of studying abroad.

Other reasons participants mentioned in addition to options in the question were:

Respondents identified *access to modern research facilities, advanced engineering programmes, possibilities for personal growth and innovation, opportunities for research and academic advancement, and access to cutting-edge technology and innovation hubs as the most important factors. Furthermore, access to research possibilities and a supportive academic*

environment, a focus on sustainability and environmental awareness, and admiration for Sweden's progressive society and gender equality were significant motivators.

Furthermore, respondents cited Sweden's technical advancement and research prospects, as well as its proximity to Iran when compared to Canada and the United States. Notably, familial ties, particularly having a sister living in Sweden, were cited as significant influences on their decision.

6.4.2 Influence of Social Media on Decision to Choose Sweden

Regarding the survey question “To what extent do you believe social media influenced your decision to choose Sweden as your study destination?”,

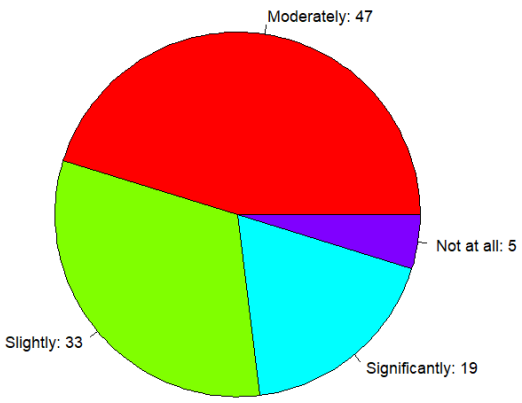


Figure 6.10: Influence of Social Media on Choosing Study Destination

The data show that social media has various degrees of influence on Iranian students for choosing Sweden as their destination country. A considerable proportion (19 replies) indicated "significant" influence, and a large number (47 replies) mentioned "Moderate" influence showing that it was not the only determinant. Furthermore, 33 respondents mentioned "slight" influence, with a minority (5 responses) stating "no influence at all," citing other reasons.

6.4.3 Evaluation of Study Options and Factors Leading to Selection of Sweden

Regarding the question “Did you consider studying in any other country before choosing Sweden? If so, what factors influenced your decision to ultimately choose Sweden as your study destination?” in the final section of the survey, participants supplied 68 responses, which

allowed me to validate their multiple question options. Out of 68 responses, several participants considered other countries before deciding on Sweden as their study location. These countries included Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Canada, England, Australia, Finland, Belgium, France, Norway, Ireland, and the United States. However, other factors affected their decision to choose Sweden over these alternatives.

Reasons for Choosing Sweden:

Family Connections

For some students, the presence of family members in Sweden played an important role in their decision-making. The ability to be close to relatives offered a sense of security, support, and familiarity in an unusual setting. Knowing they had relatives nearby undoubtedly added to their general comfort and well-being, influencing their decision to study in Sweden.

"I chose Sweden because my sister lives here, making it a natural choice for me."

Safety and Quality of Life

Sweden's reputation for safety, combined with its strong economy and good standard of living, drew participants looking for a safe and comfortable atmosphere for their research. The country's low crime rates, strong social welfare system, and emphasis on work-life balance were most likely perceived as beneficial to academic success and personal well-being. Participants may have felt reassured by Sweden's security and prosperity, making it a desirable educational destination.

"Sweden's safety and strong economy were crucial factors for me, aligning with my priorities."

"To tell you the truth, I'd considered a number of options before firming up my plans. Sweden is a safe country with a strong economy where you can live freely, make long-term plans, and enjoy high-quality education. This country certainly matches my top priorities which is why I eliminated the other options."

Ease of Visa Process

Participants liked Sweden's simple visa application process when compared to other nations. Sweden's relatively easy visa application process may have decreased bureaucratic hurdles and uncertainty, making it a more accessible alternative for overseas students. This shortened visa

process most likely resulted in smoother transfers and allowed participants to focus on their academic objectives rather than administrative responsibilities.

"The ease of obtaining a visa for Sweden compared to other countries was a significant factor in my decision."

Another participant said:

"Yes, I considered English-speaking countries like the UK, Canada, and Australia as options for my studies. However, I ultimately chose Sweden for several compelling reasons. The faster visa processing time and lower cost of living in Sweden were significant factors that made it an attractive choice for me. Additionally, the fact that many Swedes are proficient in English meant that I could easily communicate with locals, and the availability of courses taught in English made studying in Sweden accessible and appealing to me."

Reputation for Education

Sweden's recognised school system, known for its innovative curriculum, research possibilities, and practical approach to learning, played an important role in drawing participants. The country's universities are consistently ranked among the best in the world, providing high-quality education and preparing students for successful careers in their respective professions. Participants most likely appreciated Sweden's commitment to academic quality and recognised the long-term advantages of studying in such a distinguished educational environment.

"I chose Sweden for its quality education and practical courses, which are highly regarded worldwide."

"I applied for another university in Finland too, but I chose Sweden because of its reputation for safety, quality education, and technological advancement."

Supportive Laws

Sweden's supporting Laws for women and children, gender equality, family-friendly environment, and provision of free education and healthcare for student children all affected some participants' decisions.

"I applied for Australia but I got rejected. Sweden was my second choice. Ultimately I chose Sweden because of the reputation of their school's great system for kids and for my kid future."

"The fact that even as a student, my children are entitled to free education and free health care."

Sweden's reputation for Gender Equality and human Rights

Several participants cited Sweden's commitment to gender equality and women's rights as critical factors in their decision-making process. Sweden's reputation for promoting gender equality through supportive laws and societal norms heavily affected their choice of study place. This highlights the importance of gender equality issues for international students and reinforces Sweden's position as a leading advocate for such ideals in academia.

"Yes, but I chose Sweden because Sweden's strong commitment to gender equality were a major factor in my decision."

"Sweden's supportive laws for women and children made it an ideal choice for me to pursue my studies."

"Sweden's inclusive society and strong support for human rights offered an inviting environment where I could pursue my studies and contribute to positive change."

Recommendations

Recommendations from friends or family members who had positive experiences studying or living in Sweden influenced some participants' choices.

"I chose Sweden based on recommendations from friends who had studied there before and had positive experiences."

Another one mentioned:

"yes Norway, but chose Sweden because my friend recommended, and I can say I found Sweden a good country for women and women's freedom."

Proximity and Ease of Travel

Several individuals mentioned how closeness and convenience of travel influenced their decision to study in Sweden. For example, one respondent stated:

"Yes, I considered Canada but costs of living were too high there, and also the distance was important to me to travel and visit my family in Iran so I chose sweden."

English Proficiency and Courses in Sweden

For some participants, the advantage of English competence among Swedes, which facilitates smooth communication with locals for international students, was an influential aspect, as was the availability of courses offered in English, which increases the accessibility and appeal of studying in Sweden:

"Yes, I considered English-speaking countries like the UK, Canada, and Australia as options for my studies. However, I ultimately chose Sweden for several compelling reasons. The faster visa processing time and lower cost of living in Sweden were significant factors that made it an attractive choice for me. Additionally, the fact that many Swedes are proficient in English meant that I could easily communicate with locals, and the availability of courses taught in English made studying in Sweden accessible and appealing to me."

6.5 considerations

6.5.1 consistency of outcomes

The survey results show a noteworthy consistency in Iranian students' perceptions of social media's role to their decision to migrate to Sweden. It is interesting to note that, despite the different sections of survey, with each question presenting a distinct perspective on the importance of social media, 73% of answers in section3, 66% in section 4 and 63% of section 5 responses consistently stated that social media contributed significantly and more moderately to their decision-making process. As shown in figure 7.1, responses from three sections of the survey were compared, and the results were within a narrow range of importance to participants.

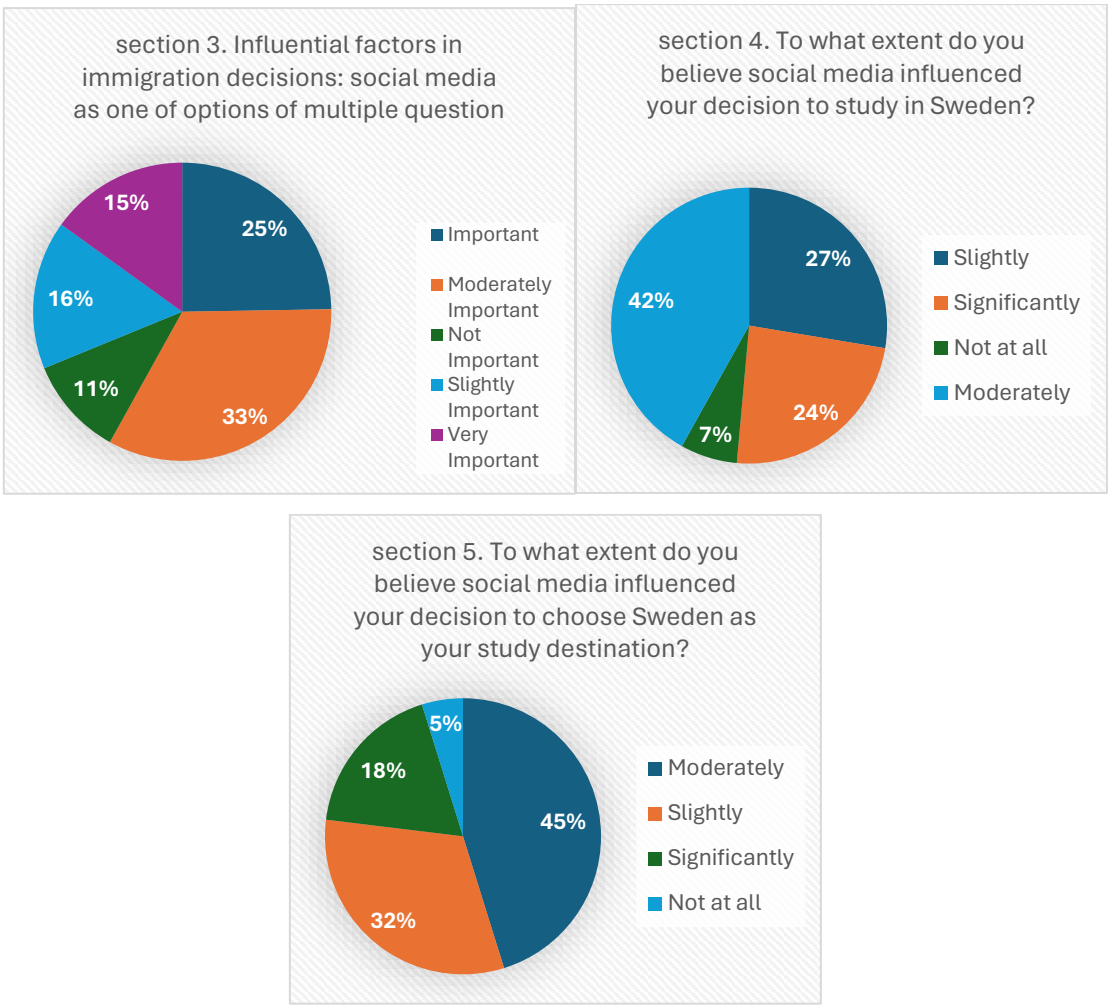


Figure 6.11: Consistency of Answers Regarding Social Media Influence

The consistency across all surveyed aspects demonstrates that the majority of Iranian students relied on social media during their migrating process.

6.5.2 Gender Analysis

I did some analysis based on gender. In the section on influential factors, I first compared the various aspects based on gender. For instance, I compared the two genders' selection of "Economic reasons" as extremely significant or important. When I looked at the gender distribution of the entire population (40.6% male and 59.4% female), I discovered that it was nearly equal, as figure 6.12 illustrates. I also compared the desire for a higher quality of life with a few other characteristics, but I didn't get any specific results worth talking about.

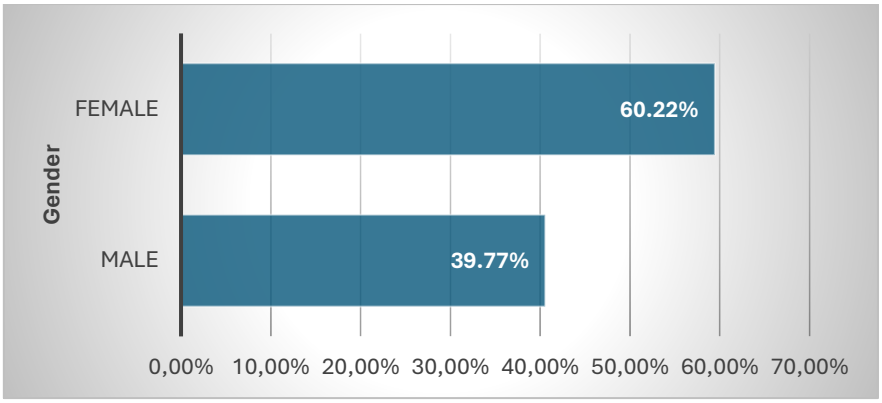


Figure 6.12: "Gender" and "Economic reasons"

One item worth mentioning is that every individual who spoke for gender equality, children's rights, and women's rights was a woman. So, I reasoned that perhaps more female participants than male participants would score "seeking personal or academic freedom" as "very important" and "important." However, as figure 6.13 illustrates, the outcome was about equal.

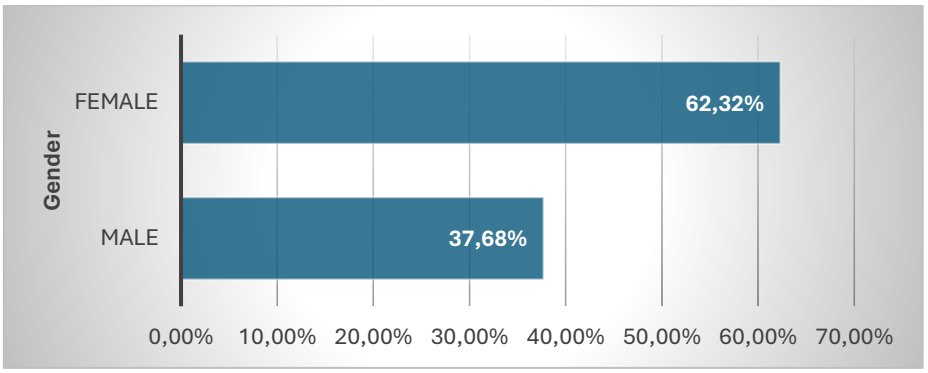


Figure 6.13: "Gender" and "Seeking personal or academic freedom"

I did the same analysis regarding the influence of social media; I compared the sum of significant and moderate influence for both genders and this was the result:

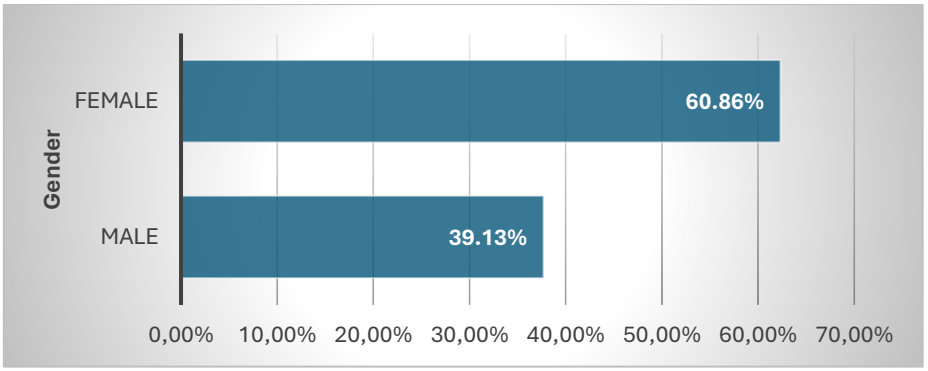


Figure 6.14: "Gender" and "Influence of social media"

Regarding the analysis of reasons for choosing Sweden as a study destination based on gender, I didn't go through each analysis item by item here because the same pattern was seen for those factors as well.

6.5.3 Status Analysis

In addition, I examined the data based on the participants' status (migrating alone or with family); however, no particular pattern emerged, as the proportions of alone and with family individuals were almost equal (48% alone and 52% with their family). As shown in figure 6.15 the distribution of importance is almost equal according to the percentage of participants' status. No particular theme emerged for discussion when the same analysis was conducted on other factors, and the same equal pattern was noted.

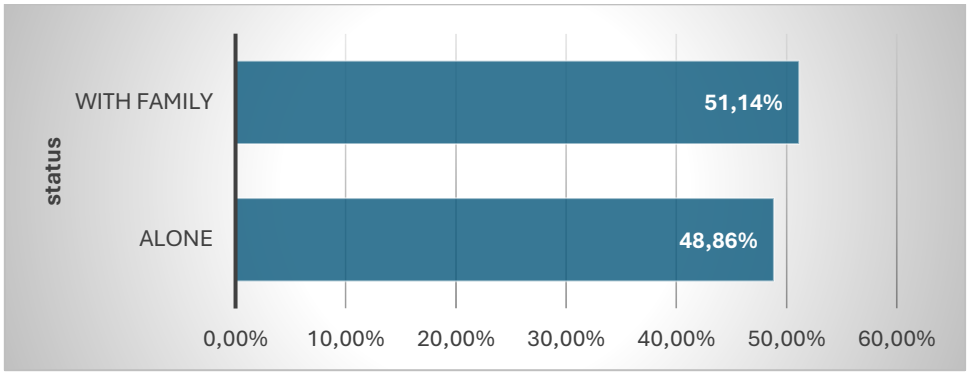


Figure 6.15 "Status" and "Economic reasons"

In addition, I examined social media's influence based on the status of participants:

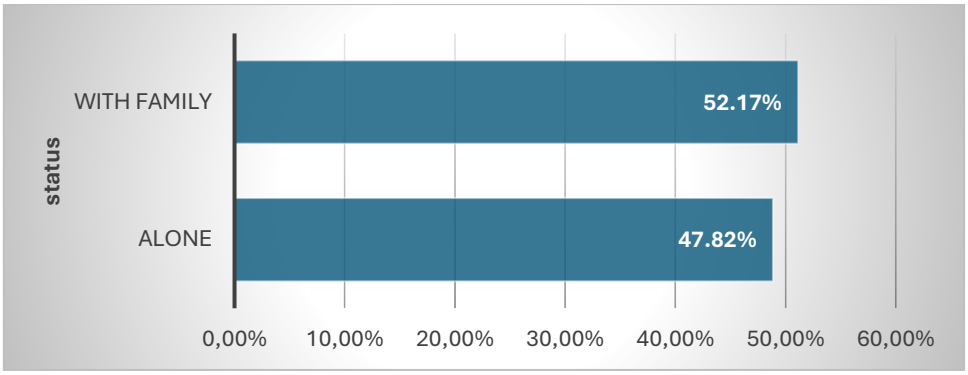


Figure 6.16: "Status" and "Influence of social media"

Regarding the analysis of reasons for choosing Sweden as a study destination based on status, the same pattern was seen for those factors as well, therefore I didn't mention the analysis of those factors.

6.5.4 Age Analysis

To identify a pattern between the age and influential factors, I categorized age in four groups to analyse the average importance ratings for each factor, by assigning numerical values to response categories and calculating the average (Not Important = 1, Slightly Important = 2, Moderately Important = 3, Important= 4, Very Important = 5).

Factor	20-30	31-40	41-50	51+
Economic reasons	3.55	3.69	3.63	3.57
Political and social instability in Iran	3.19	3.27	3.23	3.15
Education	3.35	3.40	3.36	3.31
Recommendations from friends or family	3.27	3.32	3.25	3.23
Information from social media	3.20	3.25	3.19	3.16
Desire for a better quality of life	3.44	3.50	3.47	3.39
Seeking personal or academic freedom	3.36	3.42	3.38	3.32
Safety and security concerns in Iran	3.31	3.37	3.30	3.27
Job opportunities after graduation	3.38	3.44	3.40	3.33
Climate/environment	3.19	3.24	3.19	3.14

Figure 6.17 "age" and "Influential factors"

According to the analysis, there are generally little differences in the average importance ratings for each item among the various age groups. The importance ratings for the majority of factors are largely constant across age groups. On the other hand, it seems that people in the 31–40 age range generally give most things marginally higher important ratings than those in other age groups, while people in the 51+ age range generally give most variables somewhat lower importance ratings.

In order to determine the extent of social media influence, I compared the total number of participants with the average of importance according to their age group as shown in figure 6.18. Compared to other age groups, those between the ages of 30 and 40 assessed social media as significantly and moderately influential (55.9%). There was no theme to be discussed regarding the number of participants in each age category, which is almost half of the population (48%) in the 30–40 age range.

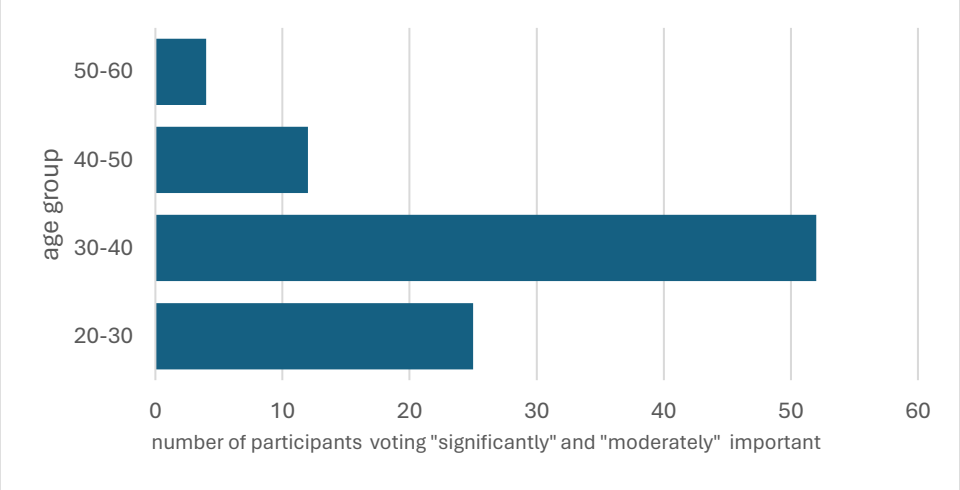


Figure 6.18: "Age "and "Influence of social media"

Regarding the role of social media, despite age differences among the participants, certain social media features—like informing them about study opportunities and motivating them to pursue higher education in Sweden—were given consistent themes in terms of importance. The information suggests that people's experiences and opinions regarding social media's influence vary greatly. It also shows how different each age group's responses are.

6.6 Summary of Findings

- The role of social media is to offer crucial information, shape perceptions, and facilitate interactions. These platforms like Instagram and Telegram allow students to learn about the culture, educational prospects, and living conditions, all of which are important factors to consider while making decisions.
- While social media has a moderate impact compared to other factors, economic stability, political climate, and personal growth potential are more powerful influences on migration decisions. Social media supplemented these variables by providing more support and information.
- Social media allows students to interact with current and former students in Sweden, decreasing uncertainty and cultivating a sense of community. This networking aspect is critical in developing good attitudes and providing practical guidance about the migration process.
- Social media has a significant influence on choosing Sweden as a study location. Positive portrayals and testimonials about Sweden's educational system, safety, and prospects for professional development make it a desirable option for Iranian students.

Chapter7: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of social media on motivations, experiences and decision-making processes of Iranian students who chose Sweden as their study destination. There were several vital questions to find out, such as: How has social media influenced the migration decision-making process of Iranian students studying in Sweden? What factors have primarily contributed to Iranian students' decision to migrate? What role has social media played in influencing Iranian students' migration decisions? What are the primary reasons Iranian students have chosen Sweden as their study destination, and to what extent has social media influenced their decision? To address those questions, data were gathered via an

online survey sent to Iranian students studying in Sweden. Through analyzing the interrelationship of individuals' desires, values, and media influence, the study can know the many factors that shape migration decisions in the era of massive use of media.

7.1 Research Reflections

I remark on study findings by responding to research sub-questions, which incorporate all research survey results.

7.2.1 Factors Contributing to Iranian Students' Migration Decision

Sub-question: What factors have primarily contributed to Iranian students' decision to migrate?

the factors primarily contributing to Iranian students' decision to migrate encompass a complex interplay of economic imperatives, aspirations for an enhanced quality of life, and the influential role of social networks, that can be interpreted as external and internal factors. The migration decisions of Iranian students are intricately woven with a diverse tapestry of motivations and considerations, as revealed through their candid reflections and experiences. Economic stability and career prospects emerge as foundational pillars driving their migration choices, echoing sentiments expressed in the participants' narratives. One of participants mentioned *"Since my homeland suffers from an ailing economy, I find it challenging to make long-term plans for my uncertain future, both money- and career-wise."* This reflection underscores the pervasive impact of economic instability, compelling individuals to seek educational opportunities abroad where prospects for financial security and career advancement appear more promising. According to neoclassical economic migration theory individuals make migration choices based on a rational assessment of the benefits and costs associated with moving relative to staying in their home country (Orrenius & Zavodny, 2015). In the case of Iranian students, economic stability and career prospects emerged as primary drivers for migration. Iran faces economic challenges, including instability and limited job opportunities, which have a direct impact on individuals' perceptions of their future prospects. Many Iranian students perceive better opportunities for career advancement and financial stability abroad, particularly in countries with robust economies and job markets. This motivation reflects the rational pursuit of economic gain, as posited by Neoclassical Economic Migration Theory. Moreover, the concept of investment in human capital is central to understanding Iranian students' migration decisions. By pursuing education abroad, they aim

to enhance their skills and qualifications, thereby increasing their earning potential in the global labor market (Massey et al., 1993). This aligns with the Neoclassical perspective, which views international migration as a form of investment aimed at maximizing individuals' productivity and earning capacity. By seeking educational opportunities abroad, they aim to improve their economic prospects and secure a better future for themselves, aligning with the rational decision-making principles outlined in the theory.

Furthermore, the desire for a better quality of life resonates deeply within the narratives of Iranian students, as they yearn for peace, freedom, and personal fulfillment. A participant's poignant testimony reflects this sentiment, stating, *"In Iran, I was all the time worried about the economy and political and social problems; I needed a stable life with less stress."* This expression encapsulates the profound longing for stability that propels many Iranian students towards seeking educational avenues abroad, where the promise of a more conducive environment for personal and intellectual growth beckons. Students' aspirations for a higher quality of life can be analysed through the lens of Lifestyle migration theory, that underscores the significance of personal well-being and subjective fulfillment as drivers of migration (Knowles & Harper, 2009). Many Iranian students expressed a longing for peace, freedom, and a sense of personal fulfillment, seeking to escape the restrictive social and political environment prevalent in Iran. This reflects a fundamental aspiration for a lifestyle characterized by greater autonomy, cultural openness, and individual expression. By pursuing educational opportunities abroad, these students aim to create a more conducive environment for personal and intellectual growth, aligning with the core tenets of Lifestyle Migration Theory.

Furthermore, the quest for personal and intellectual freedom emerged as a central theme in the motivations of Iranian students. They sought environments where they could exercise greater autonomy, express themselves freely, and engage in intellectual pursuits without fear of censorship or repression. This desire for freedom reflects a fundamental human need for self-determination and individual agency, which lifestyle migration theory recognizes as essential drivers of migration decisions.

For many Iranian students, recommendations from friends and family members who had previous experiences studying abroad proved to be influential factors in their decision-making process. Social Network Theory explains how social relationships and networks influence the migration decisions of Iranian students. The significant role of interpersonal connections in

shaping individuals' choices, particularly regarding migration-related decisions (Liu et al., 2017) is extensively recognized. By leveraging the experiences and recommendations of their social networks, these students were able to make more informed decisions about their educational pursuits and migration plans. This underscores the importance of social connections in facilitating access to information and resources relevant to migration, highlighting the role of interpersonal networks in shaping individuals' migration trajectories.

The study underlines the cutting-edge picture of the migrating Iranian students desiring to get into Higher Education in Sweden. Safety, educational level, cultural differences, and visa (policy) availability, line up with the new migration literature. Marr and Millerd (2004) give attention to social cohesion's role in this context, which is similar to the issues the Swedish focus groups are dealing with as they talk about diversity. Leading as mentioned in Komito et al. (2011), is crucial for the information and support which are provided by social media. The piece of research identifies the determinants of the trend of migration for Iranian students, indicating safety, education quality, culture, and social networks as the factors that determine the trend of students migrating to foreign countries. Talking about gender, after analysing influential factors according to gender, no significant difference was observed. It aligns well with the study done by Chiang et al. (2015) who discovered no statistically significant distinctions in the percentage of young women and men who relocate to pursue higher education.

7.2.2 Social Media's Role in Shaping Iranian Students' Migration Choices

Sub-question: What role has social media played in influencing Iranian students' migration decisions?

Social media networks act as a two-way road for data and communication that contribute to the changing thoughts and doubts of Iranian students relating to migration. According to the research, students looking to identify the finest educational institutions for them can benefit from using social media as a resource for connection, inspiration, activation, and information gathering. Iranian students attending Swedish universities have the opportunity to obtain information about studying and living in Sweden through platforms such as Instagram and Telegram. Social media can and does enabling them to discover and communicate the crucial information required for making a final decision, from language lessons to study programs and visa applications. According to Liu et al. (2017), social network theory argues that people are

surrounded by social networks that guide their behaviors, decisions, and availability to resources. In migration contexts, social networks help to form decisions and actions taken by people by providing information, advice, and support on advantages and disadvantages of moving. Digital platforms, such as Instagram and Telegram, play a significant role in social networks of Iranian students who want to migrate to Sweden. As stated by one participant, *"Through Instagram and later Telegram, I connected with current students who shared their experiences and insights about studying and living in Sweden."* This quotation demonstrates how social media enables connections inside social networks, allowing students to gain helpful information and assistance. Social media platforms enable students to access non-face-to-face interactions but still communicate with each other and stay in touch with alumni, peers, and even migration agents. Iranian students who want to migrate follow and keep in touch with other students who have already left for Sweden or are currently studying abroad to receive relevant information, experience, advice, and recommendations.

Furthermore, Iranian students actively use their social networks to obtain information, seek advice, and develop partnerships that support their migration goals. Platforms such as Instagram and Telegram provide interactive forums for students to communicate ideas, ask questions, and seek advice from peers who have been through similar migration journeys. This align well with social network theory emphasizing the dynamic nature of interpersonal relationships and networks. Such networks and groups often attract young people who are about to start their academic journey and makes the move from home to a university easier to handle and less uncertain to decide. The social media platforms' content that has motivational and inspirational effects on students, leading to the decision to migrate, is also an important factor in influencing them. The prospects of studying abroad, cultural experiences, and the opportunities prompt as well as influence prospective students to apply and proceed to further education abroad. This fits very nicely with Blumenstock et al. (2019) study. discussing social media plays an important part in shaping students' perspectives on studying abroad, impacting their adaptation to the host society as well as the significance they place on the experience of migration. It’s important to note that because of some problems due to mistrust toward national media, for Iranian students social media platforms remain a substantial and accessible information source, allowing them to handle the complications of studying abroad and to make the right decision about the future.

Moreover, social media acts as an intermediary through which aspirations and desires are shaped. Students' aspirations for a higher quality of life can be shaped by seeing the achievements of others shown on social media platforms. Iranian students are demonstrating this pursuit by contrasting the new lifestyle with the current one. Social media posts showing the successful experiences of other Iranian students abroad can intensify this desire for a better quality of life and a desirable lifestyle. As one participant mentioned, *"When I saw the remarkable progress of my same level friends on LinkedIn and compared it with my limited conditions in Iran, I was motivated to emigrate."* This is consistent with the study presented by Knowles & Harper (2009) that highlights personal aspirations and subjective well-being as essential factors in migration patterns. The complexity of migration decision-making lies in weighing goals, doubt, and the accessibility of information (Kennan and Walker, 2013; Williams and Baláž, 2012). The results obtained are in line with previous relating to social network membership as a means of keeping in touch with a home country, accelerating integration into a new society, and constructing an online identity (Mahler, 2001; McGregor and Siegel, 2013).

7.2.3 Reasons to Choose Sweden as a Study Destination for Iranian Students

Sub-question: What are the primary reasons Iranian students have chosen Sweden as their study destination, and to what extent has social media influenced their decision?

The primary elements when and why students decided to study in Sweden are safety, desirable standards of living, high quality education and research opportunities. Other factors influencing the decisions included modern research facilities, especially in technical sciences. Moreover, Sweden’s laws regarding gender equality, and the recommendations of family and friends.

According to the survey findings, high-quality education, English language programmes, and a desirable standard of living in Sweden are significant motivators for Iranian students. These variables are consistent with the neoclassical economic model's emphasis on increasing economic utility through migration to places with better educational and employment opportunities (Kennan & Walker, 2013). In addition, Sweden may attract Iranian students due to its reputation for safety, accessibility to healthcare, and cultural ideals like gender equality and human rights, in addition to its economic opportunities. According to lifestyle migration theory, these lifestyle choices indicate a desire for a comprehensive and satisfying living experience that goes beyond simple financial gain (McGarrigle, 2022).

The results are consistent with the Boyd (1989) study, which highlights the significance that social relationships, trust, and connectivity play in supporting decisions about migration. Iranian students can reach out to their social networks, such as friends, family, and peers, for guidance, support, and information about studying overseas. Due to their ability to provide venues for communication and information sharing, social media has an increased impact on migration decisions (Liu et al., 2017). The significance of social networks in influencing migration choices is shown by survey data showing the impact of social media on Iranian students' decisions to select Sweden.

The catalyst for Iranian students to choose Sweden as a study location is highlighted by safety, desirable standards of living as well as cultural diversity, and these factors are in most cases enhanced by social media. Platforms such as Instagram highlight what it's like to be a student in Sweden, making it more appealing to potential students. Platforms gave them an insight into Swedish student life, cultural diversity, and opportunity, driving them to pursue higher education overseas. Similarly, the attraction to the Swedish education system exposes the high reputation of Swedish education institutions as centers of educational excellence and innovation. Swedish universities stand for a distinguished education that provides Iranian students with the foundation for professionals in their chosen axes of interest, which in turn makes the country a more attractive place for studies. The English-language programmes offered by Swedish universities enable students to pursue their goal of a higher education without restriction by language obstacles, so making Sweden a welcome and inclusive nation for international students. Furthermore, along with the factors noted above, such as appealing standard of living, cultural diversity, as well as the ease of receiving a visa, residency permits in Sweden also play the same role in leading to the migration of Iranian students to Sweden. These are in line with a research done by Kazemi et al. (2018) that examined how Iranian students migration decisions was strongly connected with the availability of cutting-edge technology, English programmes and ease of getting a visa.

According to the results, social media influences Iranian students' decision to study in Sweden to different extents. As shown in figure 6.11, 63% considered it significantly and moderately influential. In the end, social media plays a part in Iranian students' migration choices to Sweden through sharing information, visiting posts and sharing experiences which can build new friendships and inspire them to relocate.

7.2 Influence of Social Media on Iranian Students' Migration Decisions

Main research question: How has social media influenced the migration decision-making process of Iranian students studying in Sweden?

Before addressing the main question, it is important to note the remarkable consistency in the assessments of the significance of social media across the survey's many sections. The consistency across all surveyed aspects (figure 6.11) demonstrates that the majority of Iranian students relied on social media during their migrating process. 73% of participants rated social media as significantly to moderately influential. Social media has influenced the migration decisions of Iranian students studying in Sweden by providing vital information, impacting perceptions, and forging relationships. This research shows that platforms like Instagram and Telegram are highly influential. These platforms allow prospective students to learn about the Swedish culture, educational prospects, and living conditions, all of which are important factors to consider while making decisions.

Students can connect with current and previous students in Sweden via social media, allowing them to develop networks and learn firsthand about their peers' experiences. This networking feature helps to lessen uncertainty while also fostering a sense of community and support, both of which are important in migration decisions. The statistics highlight the significance of these links in generating positive impressions and offering practical advice on the migration process (Figure 6.5). This aspect corresponds well with Hosseini et al. (2020) research results that demonstrate how social media shapes expectations, offers knowledge and assistance.

While social media plays a moderate contribution in overall migration decisions comparing to other factors, it has a greater impact on choosing Sweden as a study destination. Students utilize social media to compare various destinations, and Sweden appeals to them because of the good images and comments available online. This is reflected in the survey results, which demonstrate that students see Sweden positively after reading social media content about former and current students in Sweden (Figures 6.10).

Social media highlights the main factors that influence migration, including personal growth, political stability, and economic opportunity. This increases the perceived advantages of moving to Sweden. Social media posts frequently highlight Sweden's strong educational system, secure housing, and chances for career advancement. This is consistent with social

network theory which emphasizes human connectivity massively influences the forming of people's migration through tangible and intangible resources (Haug, 2008).

Although social media plays an important part in providing information and shaping perspectives, its influence is moderated by more powerful elements including the state of the economy, the political environment, and individual goals (Figure 6.2). The analysis demonstrates that social media is not as influential as those economic, social and personal drivers, even though it is essential for connecting people and disseminating information.

The participants' replies repeatedly serve as evidence of moderate results that social media serving as a source for information and a basis of social support for Iranian students who intend to migrate to Sweden. Platforms of social media provide information, advice, and comments as students systematically form their views over migration probabilities and prospects. Many people used social media platforms to research various facets of living in Sweden, including housing options, cultural customs, study opportunities, and visa procedures. *"Before traveling to Sweden, I made a number of connections on LinkedIn. and asked them a variety of questions concerning this."* Another said *"Telegram groups where Iranian students shared their information and experiences had the greatest impact on the ease of the process for me."* This is in line with Boyd's study (1989), which mentions according to social network theory people migrate based on their support system of people and known resources, including trust and social connectivity.

To sum up, Social media influences the migration decision-making process of Iranian students in Sweden by providing essential information, peer connections, and motivations. It plays a moderate role in shaping their perceptions of migration opportunities and outcomes, reflecting their reliance on media sources, particularly in times of uncertainty or unfamiliarity. This is in line with Komito et al. (2011) study that discusses social media platforms serve as influential agents shaping the perceptions, expectations, and decision-making processes of migrants, offering a plethora of information, guidance, and support. Additionally, it algins with Hidayati (2017) investigation that discussed student migrant use their social media to gain information before they choose that university for study. Overall, social media serves as an important resource that informs and guides Iranian students throughout their migration journey. It should be mentioned that despite social media has a notable influence on Iranian students' decision-making, but it has less influence on their decisions comparing with other factors such as economic or social considerations. This complicated role emphasises the need of understanding social media's multifaceted impact within the larger framework of migration theories and human decision-making processes.

7.3 Conclusion

The present survey-based study contributes to the existing literature by examining the role of social media in shaping motivations, aspirations, and decision-making factors among Iranian students choosing Sweden as a study destination. Based on an in-depth analysis of survey responses and researched themes, several critical aspects were identified. Firstly, the importance of the internal and external influential factors in migration decision-making of Iranian students was inferred. This way, economic stability and political factors are among the external driving factors, while the personal development and success of the individual in academic terms are the primary internal stimuli.

Secondly, contribution of such social network platforms as Instagram and Telegram to the formation of a perspective about study migration was examined. These social networks were identified moderately essential informational and motivated resources that help students develop in the academic and societal context.

Furthermore, influencing factors for choosing the destination country were analysed, the focus was on the role of economic stability, the quality of life, academic opportunities, safety, and cultural diversity implied by Iranian student migration. These aspects of migration were portrayed by the pursuit of self-development, professionalism, the choice to study in the most favorable environment, and experiencing various cultures.

The impact of social media was investigated in all parts from different perspectives. Despite my initial hypothesis that it had a strong influence on Iranian students' migration decisions, participants classified it as moderate and partly important, indicating that economic, social, and security considerations were more influential in motivating students to migrate.

This study attempted to contribute to filling the existing gap identified by Nafari et al. (2017) in Iranian students' migration decision-making by assessing relevant elements and keeping an eye on the influence of social media, which gave the entire study a modern perspective. The extensive analysis of the survey data from Iranian respondents in Sweden demonstrates the evidence of this contribution. According to the following interpretation, social media plays a notable role in Iranian students' migration decisions, with a focus on how students use social media to seek information. The consistency in the respondent responses calls for the integration of social media influence.

Furthermore, the factors encountered and identified during the study were prioritised and used to offer meaningful suggestions to institutions. The relevance of social media and communication patterns aimed at students and potential students in the age of technology play a significant role in mobilisation and marketing. Such analysis can assist institutions develop strategies to recruit a diverse student population, particularly "talented and self-funded" students (Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2013).

Since similar findings available on this subject are scarce in the relevant international scholarly literature, conclusions drawn from the results are not intended to be generalizable to other contexts but could be of broader value to those with a concern for understanding the role of social media in migration decision-making processes of students.

The findings offer implications for enhancing programs aimed at improving the support Sweden's universities can offer to international students, with a particular emphasis on giving them thorough pre-arrival information and continuing support while they adjust to their new environment. Creating specific social media accounts that are run by the universities could offer trustworthy data as well as a forum for potential students to interact with current students and ask questions. Institutions ought to make greater use of social media to connect with prospective international students. Creating interesting content that emphasises the academic, cultural, and social advantages of studying in Sweden is one way to do this.

7.3.1 Future Research

This study is not divorced from limitations. Since non-probability sampling means one cannot generalise beyond the sample (Acharya et al.,2013), and the data for this study were collected through non-probability convenience sampling method which diminishes generalizability, future studies could benefit from random sampling methods with the intention of reporting more generalizable findings.

Furthermore, although Internet surveys prove effective in collecting economical and large volumes of data, mixed methods studies furnish researchers with a way to harness strengths that offset the limitations of both quantitative and qualitative research. Accordingly, with an understanding that mixed methods studies can reduce the limitations and biases stemming from a single approach, future studies can profit from supplementary qualitative data using in-depth interviews or narrative inquiry.

Finally, such research mostly presents the results of a cross-sectional study, capturing students' social media use and migration ambitions as related to a particular time. On the contrary, the migration options are a 'dynamic' situation impacted by changing situations and experiences. Through longitudinal studies, it is possible that the students' social media engagement and migration trajectories of a changing stage of time can be monitored to capture the dynamic nature of migration decision-making. Future research could explore the longitudinal effects of social media use on migration decisions and academic outcomes among Iranian students in Sweden. By examining how students' perceptions and motivations evolve over time, researchers can gain a more nuanced understanding of the factors driving migration patterns and identify opportunities for intervention and support.

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Appendices

Appendix1.

1.1 Survey link

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScN-ecWduX4Ny-1B8s3iBnLFV7JD8yaetWlRbonMWT0fgCrog/viewform?usp=sf_link

1.2 Survey form

Section 1 of 5

The Influence of Social Media in the Migration Decision-Making of Iranian Students in Sweden

Welcome to our survey on the migration decision-making process of Iranian students studying in Sweden! Your participation in this study is invaluable as I seek to understand the reasons for your decision to study abroad. By sharing your experiences and insights, you can help me gain a better understanding of the factors that shape migration decisions among Iranian students. This survey comprises questions about your social media usage, reasons for choosing Sweden as your study destination, and the role of social media in your decision-making process. Your responses will remain anonymous and confidential and used only for research purposes. Participation in this survey is voluntary and you can skip any question you prefer not to answer. If you have any questions or concerns about the survey, please contact me at zahraaghaeerad@gmail.com. I sincerely appreciate your time and effort in completing this survey.

Section 2 of 5

Demographic Information

- Age: .....
- Gender: .....
- Field of Study: .....
- What is the starting Year of your studies in Sweden?.....
- Did you migrate alone or with your family?.....
- City of Residence in Sweden:.....
- Name of University in Sweden:.....

Section 3 of 5

Influential factors in immigration decisions

Please select all factors that influenced your choice to study overseas. (Select all that apply)

	Very Important	Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important	Not Important
Economic reasons	○	○	○	○	○
Political and social instability in Iran	○	○	○	○	○
education	○	○	○	○	○
Recommendations from friends or family	○	○	○	○	○
Information from social media	○	○	○	○	○
Desire for a better quality of life	○	○	○	○	○
Seeking personal or academic freedom	○	○	○	○	○
Safety and security concerns in Iran	○	○	○	○	○
Job opportunities after graduation	○	○	○	○	○
Climate/environment	○	○	○	○	○
Other (specify below)	○	○	○	○	○

Please Specify "other" Influential factors in question above:.....

Please share any personal reflections, experiences, specific challenges, or motivations that influenced your decision to study overseas.

.....
.....
.....
.....

Section 4 of 5

Influence of Social Media on Migration Decisions

Which social media platforms did you use to gather information about studying overseas? (Select all that apply)

	Very Important	Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important	Not Important
Facebook	○	○	○	○	○
Instagram	○	○	○	○	○
Twitter	○	○	○	○	○
LinkedIn	○	○	○	○	○
Telegram	○	○	○	○	○
WhatsApp	○	○	○	○	○
Other (specify below)	○	○	○	○	○

To what extent do you believe social media influenced your decision to study overseas?

- ○ Significantly
- ○ Moderately
- ○ Slightly
- ○ Not at all

In what ways did social media influence your decision to study overseas? (Select all that apply)

	Very Important	Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important	Not Important
Providing information about Study opportunities	○	○	○	○	○
Providing information about Student life	○	○	○	○	○
Inspiring motivation to study in Sweden	○	○	○	○	○
Language learning resources	○	○	○	○	○
Fostering Student connections	○	○	○	○	○
Facilitating cultural familiarity	○	○	○	○	○
Evoking emotional responses	○	○	○	○	○
Enabling networking opportunities	○	○	○	○	○
Universities' and institutions' Virtual events/webinars	○	○	○	○	○
Other (specify below)	○	○	○	○	○

Please Specify "other" in question above:.....

Can you share any experiences of how social media played a significant role in your decision to move abroad?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Section 5 of 5

Reasons for Choosing Sweden as a Study Destination

What were the primary reasons for choosing Sweden as your study destination? (Select all that apply)

	Very Important	Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important	Not Important
Safety and security	○	○	○	○	○
high-quality education	○	○	○	○	○
English language study programmes	○	○	○	○	○
Desirable standard of living	○	○	○	○	○
Cultural diversity	○	○	○	○	○
Ease of obtaining a visa/residency permit	○	○	○	○	○
Other (specify below)	○	○	○	○	○

Please Specify "other" in question above:.....

To what extent do you believe social media influenced your decision to choose Sweden as your study destination?

- ◯ Significantly
- ◯ Moderately
- ◯ Slightly
- ◯ Not at all

Did you consider studying in any other country before choosing Sweden? If so, what factors influenced your decision to ultimately choose Sweden as your study destination?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Appendix 2.

2.1 Demographic graphs

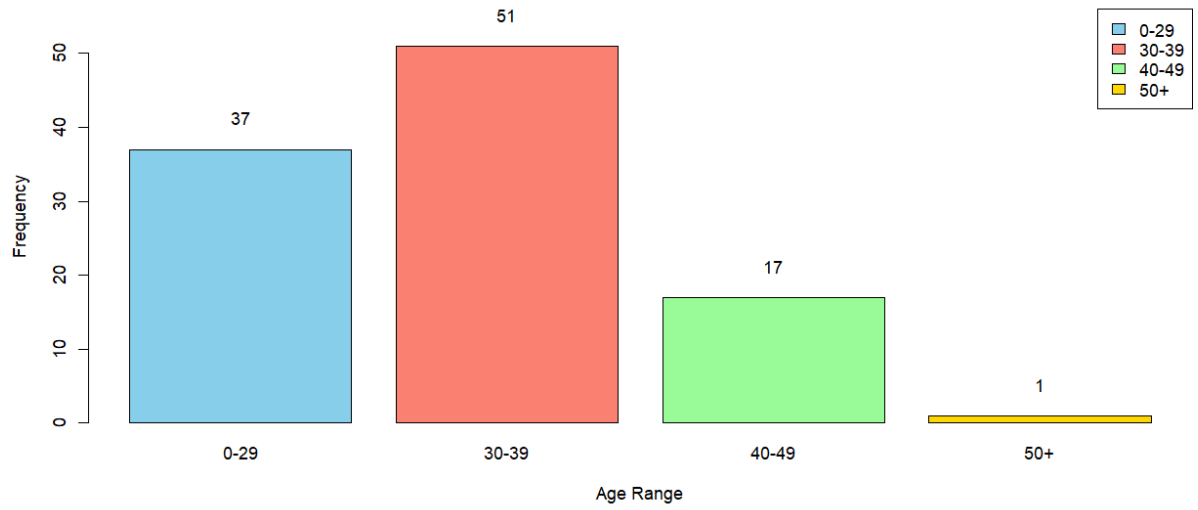


Figure A.1: Age Distribution of Participants

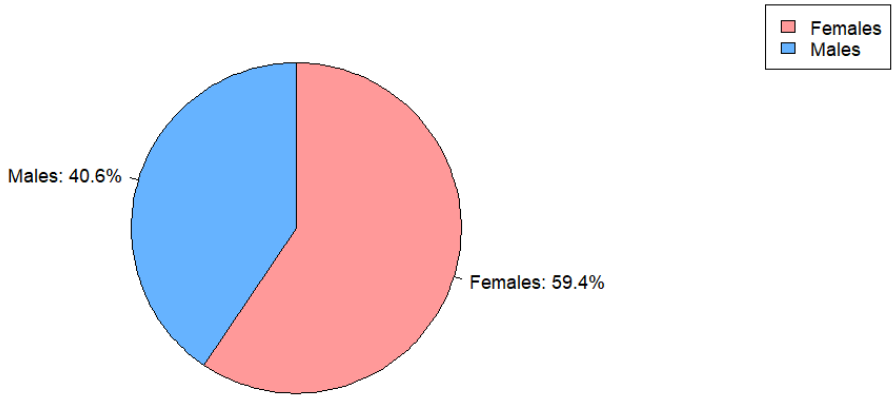


Figure A.2: Gender Distribution of Participants

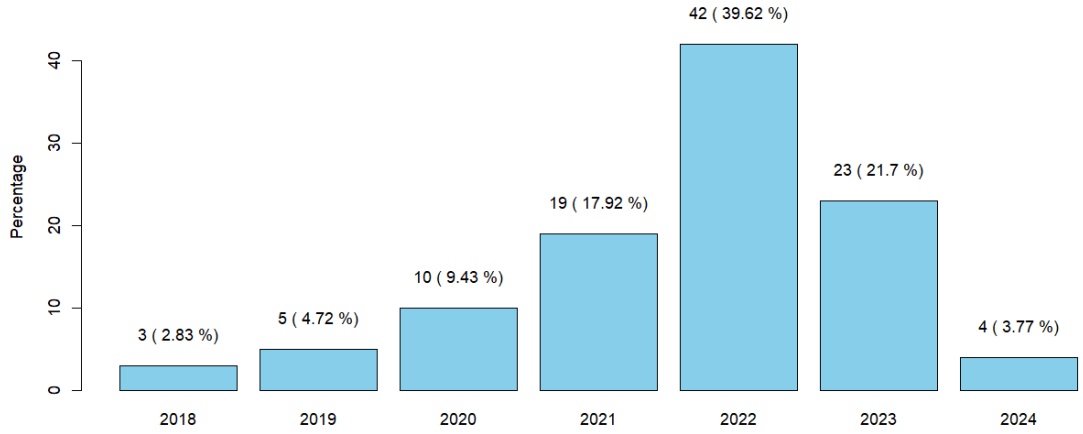


Figure A.3: Participants' Starting Year of Studies in Sweden

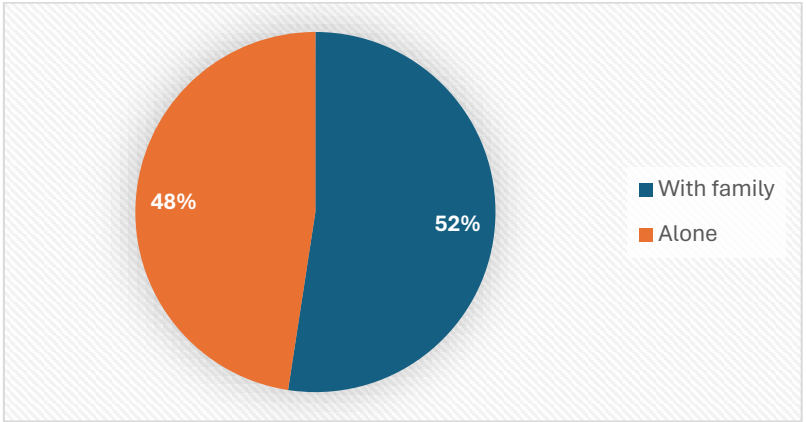


Figure A.4: Migration Status of Participants