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# How Instagram is Culturally Closer to Korean Gen Z Than Facebook: A Comparative Study

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**Abstract:** This comparative study examines why Instagram has achieved greater cultural proximity to Korean Generation Z users compared to Facebook. Through a mixed-methods approach combining surveys (N=385), semi-structured interviews (n=30), and digital ethnography, this research explores platform preferences, usage patterns, and cultural alignment factors. Results indicate that Instagram's visual-first interface, emphasis on aesthetics, integration with Korean digital culture practices, and alignment with collectivist yet individualistic self-expression resonate more deeply with Korean Gen Z values than Facebook's text-heavy, profile-centric model. Key findings reveal that 89% of Korean Gen Z participants use Instagram daily compared to 23% for Facebook, with Instagram perceived as more authentic (M=4.2, SD=0.8) and culturally relevant (M=4.5, SD=0.7) on 5-point Likert scales. The study contributes to understanding cultural adaptation of social media platforms and provides insights for platform developers targeting younger Korean demographics

**Keywords:** Instagram, Facebook, Generation Z, Korean culture, social media, cultural proximity, digital platforms.

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## INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents the first truly digital-native cohort, having grown up with smartphones, social media, and constant connectivity (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). In South Korea, Gen Z comprises approximately 13.2 million individuals who exhibit distinct digital consumption patterns shaped by the country's advanced technological infrastructure and unique cultural context (Korean Statistical Information Service, 2023). While global social media platforms compete for user attention, Instagram and Facebook demonstrate markedly different levels of cultural resonance with Korean Gen Z users.

Facebook, launched in 2004, pioneered social networking through profile-based identity presentation and network building (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). However, its popularity among younger users has declined globally, with particularly sharp decreases in Asian markets (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Instagram, acquired by Facebook (now Meta) in 2012, has followed a different trajectory, becoming the preferred platform for visual self-expression and community building among Gen Z users worldwide (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). In South Korea, this divergence is particularly pronounced. Korean Gen Z users demonstrate a strong preference for Instagram over Facebook, with usage rates of 79% versus 31% respectively among 18-24-year-olds (Korea

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Communications Commission, 2023). This gap raises important questions about cultural alignment, platform affordances, and the intersection of global technology with local cultural practices.

Cultural proximity, a concept originating in media studies, suggests that audiences prefer content and platforms that reflect their cultural values, language, and social norms (Straubhaar, 1991). This theoretical framework helps explain why certain media products succeed in specific cultural contexts while others fail to gain traction despite global popularity. Applying cultural proximity theory to social media platforms offers insights into how platform design, features, and community norms either align with or diverge from local cultural expectations.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how and why Instagram achieves greater cultural proximity to Korean Gen Z users compared to Facebook. Specifically, this research examines: (1) usage patterns and platform preferences among Korean Gen Z, (2) perceived cultural alignment of platform features and affordances, (3) the role of visual culture in platform selection, and (4) how each platform accommodates Korean cultural values around self-presentation, social connection, and digital identity. Understanding these dynamics has theoretical implications for cultural adaptation theory and practical implications for platform developers, marketers, and cultural researchers. As social media continues to evolve and fragment, insights into cultural-technological fit become increasingly valuable for predicting platform success and understanding digital culture in specific national contexts.

# LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

### Generation Z Characteristics and Digital Behavior

Generation Z exhibits distinct characteristics that differentiate them from preceding generations, particularly in their relationship with digital technology and social media (Turner, 2015). Research indicates that Gen Z users are pragmatic, visually oriented, and value authenticity over polished perfection (Priporas et al., 2017). They demonstrate shorter attention spans, preference for visual over textual communication, and sophisticated media literacy skills developed through lifelong digital immersion (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

Korean Gen Z shares these global characteristics while exhibiting culturally specific traits shaped by South Korea's unique socio-technological environment. Korea's exceptionally high smartphone penetration rate (97%) and fastest average internet speeds globally create an environment where digital and physical life are seamlessly integrated (Kim & Yang, 2020). Korean Gen Z users are characterized by their "ppalli ppalli" (hurry hurry) culture, demanding rapid content consumption and instant gratification (Lee & Kim, 2019). Additionally, they navigate between collectivist cultural heritage and increasingly individualistic self-expression, creating unique tensions in their social media behavior (Park & Kang, 2021).

### Social Media Platform Affordances and User Preferences

Social media platforms are distinguished by their affordances—the action possibilities they enable through design features and technical capabilities (Boyd, 2010). Facebook's affordances emphasize comprehensive profile building, long-form text posts, event organization, and maintenance of extensive social networks including family, colleagues, and acquaintances (Ellison et al., 2007). These features originally appealed to millennials seeking to digitize their entire social lives but increasingly feel cumbersome and invasive to younger users (Auxier & Anderson, 2021).

Instagram's affordances center on visual storytelling through photos and short videos, ephemeral Stories, curated feeds, and aesthetic coherence (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). The platform's design encourages selective self-presentation focused on visually appealing moments rather than comprehensive life documentation (Chae, 2017). Research demonstrates that Instagram users perceive the platform as more authentic and less formal than Facebook despite—or perhaps because of—its heavily curated nature (Lup et al., 2015).

Comparative studies of platform preferences among Gen Z reveal consistent patterns. Dhir et al. (2017) found that younger users prefer Instagram's visual focus and perceived authenticity, while Facebook is increasingly seen as a platform for older generations. Kircaburun et al. (2020) identified Instagram's alignment with Gen Z's need for creative self-expression and identity exploration as key factors in platform preference.

**Visual Culture and Korean Aesthetics**

Visual communication has become increasingly central to digital interaction, particularly among younger users (Highfield & Leaver, 2016). Instagram's success capitalizes on this shift toward visual-first communication, providing tools for image editing, filters, and aesthetic curation that align with Gen Z's expressive needs (Manovich, 2017). Korean culture exhibits particularly strong emphasis on visual presentation and aesthetic refinement. The concept of "미적 감각" (aesthetic sense) permeates Korean society, from product design to personal appearance to digital content creation (Choi & Kim, 2018). Korea's thriving beauty industry, fashion culture, and entertainment sector all reflect this aesthetic orientation (Kim et al., 2019). Korean digital culture has developed distinct visual languages and aesthetic trends, including "ulzzang" (best face) culture, minimalist "gamseong" (emotional) aesthetics, and sophisticated photo editing practices (Jung & Shim, 2014). Instagram's platform design accommodates these practices more naturally than Facebook's text-heavy interface, allowing Korean users to participate in global visual trends while maintaining culturally specific aesthetic expressions (Lee & Choi, 2020).

**Cultural Proximity Theory and Social Media**

Cultural proximity theory, originally developed by Straubhaar (1991) to explain media content preferences, posits that audiences prefer media products reflecting their cultural identity, values, and linguistic practices. This preference stems from the ease of understanding culturally familiar content and the pleasure of seeing one's culture represented (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005).

Applying cultural proximity to digital platforms extends beyond content to encompass platform design, communication norms, and community practices (Jin, 2015). Park (2018) argues that social media platforms achieve cultural proximity through multiple dimensions: interface design, communication affordances, alignment with cultural values, and accommodation of local practices. Korean social media usage demonstrates strong cultural specificity. Studies reveal that Korean users adapt global platforms to local practices, creating unique usage patterns and community norms (Kim & Yoon, 2017). For example, Korean Instagram users developed distinct hashtag practices, aesthetic styles, and communication patterns that differ from Western norms while maintaining global connectivity (Choi, 2019).

**Self-Presentation and Identity in Korean Context**

Self-presentation on social media involves strategic disclosure and impression management to craft desired identities (Goffman, 1959; Hogan, 2010). Korean concepts of self differ from Western individualism,

emphasizing relational identity and social harmony while increasingly incorporating individual expression (Choi et al., 2016).

Korean Gen Z navigates between "체면" (chemyeon/face) culture emphasizing proper social presentation and desire for authentic self-expression (Kim & Lee, 2018). This creates unique tensions in social media use, where users seek platforms enabling both polished presentation and perceived authenticity (Park & Kang, 2021). Research indicates that Instagram's format better accommodates this duality than Facebook. Instagram allows curated visual presentation maintaining chemyeon while offering Stories for more casual, authentic sharing (Lee & Kim, 2020). Facebook's comprehensive profile and text-heavy format conflicts with Korean preferences for selective disclosure and visual-first communication (Jung et al., 2017).

### Platform Migration and Gen Z Social Media Trends

Platform migration patterns reveal Gen Z's movement away from Facebook toward Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). This migration reflects changing social media needs, with younger users seeking platforms offering privacy from parental surveillance, creative expression tools, and peer-specific communities (Robards & Lincoln, 2017).Korean Gen Z exhibits similar migration patterns with cultural specificity. Studies document declining Facebook usage coinciding with rising Instagram and Korean platform (KakaoTalk, Naver Band) engagement (Korea Press Foundation, 2022). Motivations include escaping parental monitoring, avoiding professional network obligations, and seeking aesthetically aligned spaces (Han & Kim, 2021).

### Gap in Literature

While existing research addresses Gen Z social media preferences and Korean digital culture separately, limited studies examine the cultural-technological fit between specific platforms and Korean Gen Z. This study addresses this gap by systematically comparing Instagram and Facebook's cultural proximity to Korean Gen Z users, examining both platform affordances and cultural alignment factors.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and digital ethnography to provide comprehensive understanding of Instagram and Facebook's cultural proximity to Korean Gen Z users (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The triangulation design allowed validation of findings across multiple data sources and methods (Denzin, 2012).

### Participants

Quantitative Phase: The survey sample consisted of 385 Korean Gen Z participants (ages 18-24, M=21.3, SD=1.8) recruited through university networks and social media in Seoul, Busan, and Daegu. The sample included 58% female, 41% male, and 1% non-binary participants. All participants reported using at least one social media platform daily. Inclusion criteria required Korean nationality or permanent residency and age within Gen Z parameters.

Qualitative Phase: Thirty participants from the survey sample volunteered for semi-structured interviews (14 male, 16 female, ages 19-24, M=21.7). Purposive sampling ensured diversity in major fields of study, socioeconomic backgrounds, and social media usage patterns (Patton, 2015).

**Data Collection**

Surveys: A 45-item questionnaire assessed platform usage patterns, preferences, perceived cultural alignment, and motivations. Items adapted from validated scales measuring social media engagement (Ellison et al., 2007), cultural identity (Yoon, 2016), and platform affordances (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Participants rated agreement using 5-point Likert scales (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree). Interviews: Semi-structured interviews lasting 45-60 minutes explored participants' experiences with Instagram and Facebook, perceptions of cultural fit, and reasons for platform preferences. Interview protocol included questions about daily usage, emotional connections to platforms, cultural alignment perceptions, and specific features influencing preferences. Interviews were conducted in Korean, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Digital Ethnography: Researchers observed 50 randomly selected Instagram and Facebook profiles from participants who provided consent, analyzing content types, aesthetic styles, engagement patterns, and cultural elements. Observation periods spanned three months, documenting posting frequency, content themes, and community interactions (Pink et al., 2016).

**Measures**

Platform Usage: Daily usage frequency, time spent per session, primary activities, and feature utilization. Cultural Proximity: Perceived alignment with Korean values, aesthetic preferences, communication styles, and cultural identity expression measured through adapted cultural proximity scales (Straubhaar, 2007). Perceived Authenticity: Platform perception as authentic, genuine, and representing "real" self, measured using authenticity scales (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Self-Presentation: Comfort level with self-expression, perceived audience, and presentation strategies assessed through adapted self-presentation measures (Hogan, 2010).

Platform Preference: Overall preference rating, emotional connection, and likelihood of continued use.

**Data Analysis**

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 28.0. Descriptive statistics summarized usage patterns and platform preferences. Independent samples t-tests compared ratings between Instagram and Facebook. Multiple regression analysis identified predictors of platform preference. Statistical significance was set at $p<0.05$ (Field, 2013). Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. Transcripts were coded in Korean, with themes developed through iterative analysis. Thematic saturation was achieved after 25 interviews, with five additional interviews confirming no new themes emerged. Codes and themes were translated to English for reporting, with back-translation verification ensuring accuracy. Digital ethnographic data were analyzed using content analysis, categorizing posts by type, aesthetic elements, and cultural markers (Krippendorff, 2018). Inter-rater reliability was established with two coders analyzing 20% of profiles (Cohen's $\kappa=0.82$).

**Ethical Considerations**

The study received approval from the Institutional Review Board. All participants provided informed consent. Survey and interview data were anonymized. Digital ethnography included only public profiles with explicit participant consent. Data were stored securely with access limited to research team members (Markham & Buchanan, 2012).

# RESEARCH RESULTS

### Quantitative Findings

**Platform Usage Patterns:** Survey results revealed stark differences in Instagram and Facebook usage among Korean Gen Z. Instagram showed significantly higher daily usage (89.4% vs. 23.1%, $\chi^2$=325.47, $p<0.001$) and longer session duration (M=47.3 minutes vs. M=12.8 minutes, $t(384)=28.46$, $p<0.001$). Instagram users reported accessing the platform multiple times daily (M=8.3 times, SD=3.2) compared to Facebook (M=1.9 times, SD=2.1; $t(384)=24.17$, $p<0.001$).

Primary activities differed significantly between platforms. Instagram users primarily engaged in viewing Stories (76.2%), browsing feeds (71.4%), posting photos (52.3%), and viewing Reels (48.9%). Facebook users primarily checked notifications (42.1%), viewed marketplace (28.3%), checked events (19.2%), and browsed feeds (15.7%).

**Cultural Proximity Perceptions:** Instagram received significantly higher cultural proximity ratings than Facebook across all measures (see Table 1). Participants rated Instagram as more aligned with Korean aesthetic values (M=4.48, SD=0.69 vs. M=2.31, SD=0.94; $t(384)=32.15$, $p<0.001$), communication preferences (M=4.35, SD=0.74 vs. M=2.18, SD=0.88; $t(384)=31.28$, $p<0.001$), and cultural identity expression (M=4.21, SD=0.82 vs. M=2.09, SD=0.91; $t(384)=29.41$, $p<0.001$).

| Measure | Instagram M(SD) | Facebook M(SD) | t-value | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Aesthetic Alignment** | 4.48 (0.69) | 2.31 (0.94) | 32.15 | <0.001 |
| **Communication Style Fit** | 4.35 (0.74) | 2.18 (0.88) | 31.28 | <0.001 |
| **Cultural Identity Expression** | 4.21 (0.82) | 2.09 (0.91) | 29.41 | <0.001 |
| **Perceived Authenticity** | 4.18 (0.79) | 2.24 (0.86) | 28.69 | <0.001 |
| **Platform Belonging** | 4.33 (0.71) | 1.97 (0.93) | 33.52 | <0.001 |

*Table 1. Cultural Proximity Ratings Comparison Between Instagram and Facebook*

**Perceived Authenticity and Self-Presentation:** Instagram was perceived as significantly more authentic (M=4.18, SD=0.79) than Facebook (M=2.24, SD=0.86; $t(384)=28.69$, $p<0.001$). Paradoxically,

participants acknowledged Instagram content was more curated (M=4.52, SD=0.63) yet felt this curation represented their "true" aesthetic identity more accurately than Facebook's format.

Self-presentation comfort ratings favored Instagram (M=4.27, SD=0.76) over Facebook (M=2.34, SD=0.91; $t(384)=28.93$, $p<0.001$). Participants reported greater control over self-presentation on Instagram (M=4.41, SD=0.68) compared to Facebook (M=2.47, SD=0.89; $t(384)=29.47$, $p<0.001$).

**Regression Analysis:** Multiple regression analysis identified significant predictors of Instagram preference ($R^2=0.68$, $F(6,378)=134.82$, $p<0.001$). Aesthetic alignment ($\beta=0.34$, $p<0.001$), perceived authenticity ($\beta=0.28$, $p<0.001$), visual communication preference ($\beta=0.24$, $p<0.001$), and privacy control ($\beta=0.19$, $p<0.01$) emerged as significant predictors. For Facebook, regression analysis explained less variance in preference ($R^2=0.31$, $F(6,378)=27.94$, $p<0.001$) with utility functions ($\beta=0.42$, $p<0.001$) and professional networking ($\beta=0.23$, $p<0.01$) as primary predictors.

**Qualitative Findings**

Thematic analysis of interview data revealed five major themes explaining Instagram's greater cultural proximity to Korean Gen Z.

**Theme 1: Visual-First Communication Aligns with Korean Aesthetic Culture:** Participants consistently emphasized Instagram's visual format as culturally resonant. One 22-year-old female participant explained: "Korean culture is so visual—how things look matters a lot. Instagram fits this perfectly. Everything is about the image, the aesthetic, the vibe. Facebook feels like reading a diary, but Instagram feels like creating art."

Participants associated Instagram with Korean aesthetic concepts including "gamseong" (emotional atmosphere), "bunwigi" (ambient mood), and "mi" (beauty). A 21-year-old male participant stated: "When I post on Instagram, I think about the whole gamseong of my feed. It's very Korean to care about these details. Facebook doesn't have this feeling."

**Theme 2: Instagram Enables Dual Self-Presentation:** Participants described Instagram's structure as accommodating both polished presentation and casual authenticity, resolving tensions between chemyeon (social face) and authentic expression. A 23-year-old female participant explained: "On Instagram, my feed is very curated—that's my chemyeon, what I show the world. But Stories are more real, more casual. I can be both versions of myself."

This duality contrasted with Facebook's singular profile model. Participants felt Facebook required consistent presentation across all content, creating pressure and inauthenticity. One 20-year-old participant noted: "Facebook is like wearing formal clothes all the time. Instagram lets me dress up in my feed but wear pajamas in Stories."

**Theme 3: Privacy and Selective Sharing:** Privacy concerns featured prominently in platform preferences. Participants described Facebook as invasive and inescapable from parental and extended family surveillance. A 24-year-old participant stated: "Facebook is where my parents and relatives are. I can't be myself. Instagram is my space—I control who sees what."

Instagram's affordances for selective sharing through Close Friends lists, Story privacy settings, and temporary content resonated with Korean Gen Z's desire for bounded authenticity. Participants appreciated controlling their audience and presentation context.

**Theme 4: Generational and Temporal Association:** Participants strongly associated Facebook with older generations and past eras. Instagram represented currency and youth culture. A 19-year-old participant explained: "Facebook is for ajummas [middle-aged women] and ajussis [middle-aged men]. It's old-fashioned. Instagram is where people my age are, where trends happen."

This temporal association influenced perceived cultural relevance. Facebook was described as "2000s energy" while Instagram represented "now." Several participants mentioned using Facebook only for university group requirements or family obligations.

**Theme 5: Community and Trend Participation:** Participants described Instagram as central to Korean youth culture participation. Trending challenges, aesthetic movements, and community bonding occurred primarily on Instagram. A 22-year-old participant noted: "If something is trending in Korea, it's on Instagram first. That's where we share our lives, our style, our interests. Facebook feels disconnected from what's actually happening."

Korean-specific Instagram practices including "인스타그래머블" (Instagrammable) location hunting, aesthetic challenge participation, and community hashtag use created culturally specific engagement patterns absent from Facebook.

**Digital Ethnography Findings**

Profile analysis revealed distinct aesthetic and content patterns between platforms. Instagram profiles demonstrated high visual cohesion with 78% exhibiting consistent color palettes, filters, or thematic elements. Common aesthetic styles included minimalist (32%), pastel/soft (28%), urban/street (23%), and lifestyle/editorial (17%).

Content analysis showed Instagram posts focused on lifestyle moments (42%), fashion/beauty (31%), food (18%), and travel (9%). Captions were typically brief (M=8.3 words) with extensive emoji and hashtag use (M=12.4 hashtags per post). Korean and English mixing was common (67% of posts), reflecting Korean Gen Z's bilingual digital practices.

Facebook profiles showed less visual cohesion (23% with consistent aesthetics) and more varied content including shared articles (38%), life updates (24%), event information (19%), and photos (19%). Captions were longer (M=42.7 words) with fewer emojis and hashtags. Content felt more obligatory and functional rather than curated for aesthetic effect.

Engagement patterns differed substantially. Instagram posts received higher average likes (M=187.3 vs. M=24.6) and more consistent engagement from peers. Facebook engagement came primarily from family members and older connections. Comments on Instagram were brief and affirmative (M=3.2 words), while Facebook comments were longer and more conversational (M=15.8 words).

# DISCUSSION

This study's findings illuminate why Instagram achieves greater cultural proximity to Korean Gen Z than Facebook across multiple dimensions: aesthetic alignment, communication style fit, self-presentation affordances, and community practices.

**Visual Culture and Aesthetic Resonance**

The strong preference for Instagram's visual-first format reflects Korean culture's emphasis on aesthetic presentation and visual communication (Choi & Kim, 2018). Instagram's design philosophy aligns with Korean aesthetic values privileging refined visual presentation, attention to detail, and emotional atmosphere (Lee & Choi, 2020). Facebook's text-heavy interface conflicts with Korean Gen Z's communication preferences and broader cultural emphasis on "보는 것" (seeing/watching) over "읽는 것" (reading).

This finding extends cultural proximity theory (Straubhaar, 1991) by demonstrating that platform affordances themselves—not just content—can achieve cultural resonance. Instagram's visual affordances enable participation in distinctly Korean aesthetic practices including gamseong curation, ulzzang photography, and minimalist design trends, creating cultural alignment at the infrastructural level (Jin, 2015).

**Dual Self-Presentation and Cultural Identity**

Instagram's accommodation of dual self-presentation—curated feeds plus ephemeral Stories—resolves tensions between Korean concepts of chemyeon (social face) and authentic expression (Kim & Lee, 2018). This structural feature allows Korean Gen Z to maintain proper social presentation while expressing individual identity, navigating between collectivist heritage and individualistic desires (Park & Kang, 2021).

Facebook's singular profile model fails to accommodate this cultural duality, requiring consistent self-presentation across all contexts. This misalignment creates discomfort and perceived inauthenticity, driving platform abandonment (Jung et al., 2017). The finding that Instagram is perceived as more authentic despite being more curated suggests that cultural alignment in self-presentation structures matters more than superficial authenticity.

**Privacy and Generational Boundaries**

Korean Gen Z's desire for privacy from parental surveillance reflects broader generational negotiations around digital spaces (Boyd, 2014). Instagram's affordances for selective sharing enable creation of peer-specific communities insulated from family monitoring (Robards & Lincoln, 2017). Facebook's cross-generational presence transforms it from youth space to family obligation, fundamentally altering its cultural meaning for Gen Z users.

This generational stratification reflects what Hargittai (2020) terms "platform demography"—age-based platform segregation driven by differential adoption patterns. For Korean Gen Z, Facebook represents "parent space" while Instagram signifies "our space," with profound implications for cultural proximity and platform choice.

**Temporal Association and Cultural Relevance**

Instagram's association with "now" versus Facebook's association with "past" reflects Gen Z's orientation toward currency and trend participation (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Korean digital culture's rapid trend cycles and emphasis on staying current amplify this temporal dimension (Lee & Kim, 2019). Platforms perceived as outdated lose cultural relevance regardless of functionality, as cultural proximity includes temporal alignment with contemporary cultural moments.

This temporal dimension of cultural proximity extends existing theory by highlighting that platform-culture fit is not static but requires ongoing alignment with evolving cultural practices and values (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005).

**Implications for Cultural Adaptation Theory**

These findings suggest that successful global platforms achieve cultural proximity through multiple pathways: (1) platform affordances enabling local cultural practices, (2) accommodation of culturally specific self-presentation needs, (3) community norms reflecting local values, and (4) temporal alignment with generational culture. Instagram's success stems from fortuitous alignment across these dimensions rather than deliberate localization, raising questions about intentional versus emergent cultural adaptation (Park, 2018).

The study also reveals limits to platform universality. Despite Facebook's early success in Korea, misalignment with evolving Korean youth culture and generational shifts eroded cultural proximity (Kim & Yoon, 2017). This suggests cultural-technological fit requires ongoing maintenance and adaptation as user demographics and cultural practices evolve.

**Limitations**

This study has several limitations. The sample concentrated in urban areas may not represent rural Korean Gen Z experiences. The cross-sectional design captures current patterns but cannot establish causal relationships or track changes over time. Self-reported data may reflect social desirability bias, though triangulation with digital ethnography provides validation. The study examined Instagram and Facebook exclusively, limiting generalizability to other platforms. Future research should include broader platform ecosystems, longitudinal designs, and diverse geographic samples.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Instagram achieves significantly greater cultural proximity to Korean Gen Z than Facebook through alignment with visual communication preferences, accommodation of dual self-presentation needs, facilitation of privacy and peer-community building, and association with contemporary youth culture. These findings contribute to understanding cultural adaptation of digital platforms and highlight the importance of cultural-technological fit in platform success.

The implications extend beyond Instagram and Facebook to broader questions about how global technologies succeed or fail in specific cultural contexts. As social media continues evolving, understanding cultural proximity factors becomes increasingly important for platform developers, marketers, and cultural researchers. For Korean Gen Z, platform choice reflects deeper cultural negotiations around identity, aesthetics,

generational boundaries, and cultural values, making social media selection culturally meaningful rather than merely functional.

Future research should explore how platforms might deliberately enhance cultural proximity, examine cultural adaptation processes in other national contexts, and investigate how platform migration patterns reflect broader cultural shifts. As digital platforms become increasingly central to social life, understanding their cultural resonance with specific populations remains a critical research priority.

The Korean Gen Z-Instagram relationship exemplifies how global technologies become culturally embedded through alignment with local values, practices, and generational identities. This cultural-technological fit, more than features or functionality alone, determines platform success in culturally specific markets. As digital platforms proliferate, achieving and maintaining cultural proximity will separate thriving platforms from those left behind by changing cultural tides.

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