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***Keeping Social Ties Away from Home:
Being Virtually Together across Continents through Instant Messaging***

Instant messengers (IM) provide a convenient and inexpensive way for people to have real-time long-distance communication with their friends, family, and colleagues on the Internet. Hence, this study was designed to explore IM's potential for helping people to keep their social ties to their hometown community and maintain their cultural identities when they are away from home. A survey of Korean students in US universities was conducted to find out their IM usage frequency along with other communication tools, and the geographical composition of their IM social networks. The findings show that people used IM to communicate with their peers and relatives in home country while they were living in a foreign country. Future research is suggested to fully understand whether IM has actually enabled people to retain and reinforce their native social norms and identity when they are no longer physically a part of their home place.

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