

Unveiling how consumers from different cultures engage with Facebook pages

Myron Guftométros, ISCTE-Instituto Universitario de Lisboa, Portugal

João Guerreiro*, ISCTE-Instituto Universitario de Lisboa, Portugal

Sandra Maria Correia Loureiro, ISCTE-Instituto Universitario de Lisboa, Portugal

Abstract:

The aim of the current study is to go further in understanding how Hofstede's cultural dimensions can contribute to mirror differences between cultures in social media context. The data are extracted from 6750 posts from 225 different Facebook brand pages and 15 different countries. Thus, engagement metrics (e.g., the amount of likes, shares and comments, as well as funny likes) are analyzed through correlation analysis. Findings reveal that countries low in individualism and/or high in power distance share posts more than comment on them. Also, higher scores on individualism tend to be associated with the use of the funny emoticon responses. Finally, Hofstede's dimensions can still have powerful predictors in social media. The results of this study shed further light on the debate whether or not cultural differences are becoming more/less significant in the increased inter-connectiveness and globalization in the world.

Keywords: National cultures, Social Media Marketing, Engagement

Introduction and Research Aim

The aim of this study is to go further in understanding how Hofstede's cultural dimensions can contribute to mirror differences between cultures in social media context. We address the following research question: **RQ1:** Can consumers from different countries with different cultures express themselves in a similar way on social media? Such research question will enhance the main topic of the conference because consumers are continuously changing the way they express themselves on social media.

Background and/or Conceptual Model

Individualistic countries have low in-group relationships, when compared with collectivistic countries (Hofstede et al., 2010). These last countries rely more on WOM as a source of information (Goodrich & De Mooij, 2013). Citizens from low power distance are more focused on facts and impersonal sources (Goodrich & De Mooij, 2013) and so they exert greater effort in maintaining relationships, because these are not naturally part of their identity. Making a comment about a post is a way to maintain or build friendships with a particular person. Yet, collectivists feel that they are part of a natural group and thus may choose to share the entire post to their group of friends. Hence: *H1- The amount of shares compared to comments (shares/comments ratio) is negatively related to individualism and positively related to power distance.* Hofstede posits that countries high in uncertainty avoidance are more emotionally expressive than countries low in this dimension (Hofstede et al., 2010). In this vein, countries high in individualism become amazed and surprise more often (Matsumoto, Yoo, & Fontaine, 2008) and are more willing to express emotions (in particular negative) to companies (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). Therefore: *H2- The total use of emoticon responses (emoticon responses/likes ratio) is positively related to individualism and uncertainty avoidance.* According to De Mooij, countries that are high in uncertainty avoidance and power distance, and low in individualism will use drama, entertainment or metaphors more as advertising styles. Countries low in uncertainty avoidance and power distance, and high in individualism use humor more as an advertising style (De Mooij, 2004). On Facebook one can assign a 'funny emoticon' to a post that you find humorous. Therefore: *H3- The use of the funny emoticon (funny/likes ratio) is negatively related with uncertainty avoidance and power distance, and positively related to individualism.*

Methodology

In the current study, Facebook is the elected social media due to: (i) it is the most widely used and recognizable social media for following and engaging with a company, particularly in Europe, (ii) only few companies used in this study have an Instagram or Twitter profile for all countries, (iii) the engagement options on Facebook are higher than on Instagram or Twitter. On Facebook we can like (love, wow, funny, angry or sad), comment and share, which are more options than either of the other two platforms. Fifteen companies from different sectors are compared over 15 countries. Audi, BMW, Coca Cola, Disney, Dove, Fanta, Honda, Huawei, IKEA, L'Oréal, McDonald's, Nespresso, Nivea, Samsung and Toyota were compared in Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. The criteria for selecting the companies to be included are: (i) has to have a market share in each country based on Euromonitor country reports (Euromonitor, 2018), or be a part of the top 100 brands in the world (Independent, 2016); (ii) has to have a Facebook page for each country, (iii) has to have enough activity on the Facebook page. From each Facebook page, 30 posts are extracted starting at the same date for every page and working down until 30 posts are reached. Hence, total of 6750 posts are gathered. The only posts not included are situations wherein consumers can vote using the emoticon responses or when consumers can win something when they comment. These criteria

allow to achieve good data quality. From each post, the following information is captured shares, comments, likes and the emoticon responses (funny). The countries employed in this study have different populations' sizes and certain brands may be more popular in one country compared to another. Thus, all the variables used in this study are ratios to be able to measure differences between the countries, that is, we (i) Start with the full sample of 6750 posts (30 posts from 225 brand pages), (ii) Sum up each variable (shares, comments, likes, funny) per brand page, (iii) Divide variables by each other, for example total shares of brand page divided by total comments, this creates a sample of 225 with ratios for each variable for each brand page, (iv) These ratios are then added up for each country, which creates the country scores on each ratio, and (v) The result is a distilled sample of 15 with the country ratios for each variable.

Results and/or Discussion and Contributions

Significant correlations are found with individualism, power distance and uncertainty avoidance. The shares/comments ratio is negatively correlated with individualist $r=-.400$ ($p<.001$) but positively correlated with power distance ($r=.315$, $p<.001$) thus supporting H1. H2 is rejected, hence, none of the dimensions are significantly correlated to the emoticon responses/likes ratio. H3 was partially supported since significant correlations are found with individualism ($r=.168$, $p<.05$) and uncertainty avoidance ($r=-.142$, $p>.05$), but not with power distance. When arguing the findings, we may claim that cultural dimensions still could be used to predict some behaviors on this medium. For instance, social media can be used for predicting whether a country has more of a propensity to share a post than comment on it. Collectivists view themselves to be part of a group so sharing something to their entire group of Facebook friends is preferable to commenting one or more people specifically. By contrast, individualists are not organically part of a group and thus feel more the need to build and maintain friendships online (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). Indeed, high power distance is related to people using social media and WOM to form an opinion (Goodrich & De Mooij, 2013), so sharing something is facilitating this process by providing new information to the group of friends and simultaneously getting feedback from them on the shared post. Another reason that people from low power distance countries comment more, could be that the company is not regarded as an entity that is above them, but rather as an equal. The use of the funny emoticon is positively related to individualism, and negatively related to uncertainty avoidance, because these countries are expected to prefer the humorous advertising style (De Mooij, 2004). Power distance is an insignificant predictor (Matsumoto et al., 2008).

Implications for Theory and Practice

Viral marketing campaigns might work better in countries high in power distance and low in individualism, whereas posts inviting people to comment on their friends posts are more suited for the opposite countries. The main difference that is found in emoticon responses is that the funny emoticon response is positively related to individualism and negatively to uncertainty avoidance. This study shows that differences between cultures still exist, even on a new platform such as social media which is assumed to converge cultures. As for practice, when a post gets shared it takes a more prominent place on the timeline of the friends of the person who shared the post. Indeed, it is displayed on the profile of the person who shared it. Viral marketing campaigns which work best when content is continuously shared to an expanding group of people might work better in collectivistic countries and countries high in power distance. Asking people to comment on their friends posts might be more effective in the opposite countries. It is useful for managers to be aware of what emoticon responses are used more in which culture, because it allows them to cater to these sentiments more effectively. For example, humorous posts might be more in line with what consumers are expecting in countries high in individualism and low in uncertainty avoidance.

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