

Motivations of Individuals Participating in Social Media: A Cultural Perspective

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Social media is an information technology that allows users to communicate and share information. With steadily rising number of users across the globe, individuals participate in various activities, like connecting with friends and community members, sharing information, posting political messages, disaster recovery activities, reading daily news, learning, and entertainment, each driven by different sets of motivations. Culture has an influence on the kind of motivation—pro-social and personal needs oriented—that drives social media usage by individuals. Using Hofstede's (1984b) cultural dimensions, the paper suggests that each of the dimensions will have influences on the social media behaviors differently. Such a cultural perspective helps future social media users to plan the kind of activity and information sharing based on the kind of motivation driving the target audience and the platform providers to design and market accordingly.

Keywords: motivation, social media, hofstede's cultural dimensions, social media usage

Introduction

Social media is an information technology for mobile and computer devices, which offers highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities can contribute, share, collectively create, discuss, and modify user-generated content in forms of text, images, audio, video, and other forms of digital media (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). The rising popularity of social media in the past decade has resulted in a revolution in content generation and sharing by users, online community of individual users, along with the expression of consumer and citizen opinions publicly (Smith, 2009). The leading social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest. The emergence of ubiquitous Internet and social media platforms has made it possible for one user to communicate with hundreds of people across the nation, and even, worldwide (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). There are multiple reasons why people get active on social media, like sharing opinions, connecting to friends and acquaintances, easy communication to a group, keeping in touch with latest news and information (through content shared by others), or simple recreation due to various applications provided by social media platforms. What motivations drive people to use social media would help design and promotion of platforms across different nations or cultures.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) defined social media as follows: "Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content". And therefore, it is "fundamentally changing the way we communicate, collaborate, consume, and create" (Aral, Dellarocas, & Godes, 2013, p. 3).

Open journaling and information sharing through social media, like Facebook and Twitter, has been fundamentally defined as a kind of open development—a concept that lets communities of like-minded participants develop information systems and related artifacts that are shared freely with other users (Scacchi, 2004). Owing to the similarity and relatedness of the concepts, this paper would borrow from both social media and open development motivations to understand what cultural dimensions trigger individuals from different settings to participate in social media.

Social media research has found users being guided by personality-based motivations (Seidman, 2013; Correa, Amber, & Zuniga, 2010), consumer and brand related motivations for product information (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011; Heinonen, 2011), in-group and individualistic behaviors (Barker, 2009), internal and external motivations (Lin & Lu, 2011), and more. This paper focuses on a new set of motivations to understand the reason why individuals participate in social media—altruistic or pro-social motivations and personal needs oriented. While the pro-social motivations include the developers' individual tendency to help the community, status and reputation, and aspiration for social identity (Hars & Ou, 2001), the personal needs encompass a multitude of reasons, like personal enjoyment, learning, feeling of personal ownership, and career advancement opportunities (Fang & Neufeld, 2009). These motivations are heavily researched areas in the field of information systems (IS) open development projects, and hence, we propose to extend it further for social media research. The purpose of this paper is to find the influence of national culture on which set of motivational needs—pro-social or personal needs—guides individuals to participate in and communicate through social media platforms.

Hofstede (1980) defined national culture in four dimensions in his seminal paper, namely, individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity. G. Hofstede, G. J. Hofstede, and Minkov (1991) later added another dimension named “Long versus Short-Term Orientation” (LTO) based on the work by Michael Bond's dimension “Confucian Work Dynamism” (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). In this article, the author will consider these five cultural dimensions for national culture separately to understand each of their influence on motivations related to social media participations. The propositions will suggest whether a high or low score on a cultural dimension will result in greater pro-social or personal needs oriented motivations when an individual decides to communicate through social media platforms.

Social media has led to national activism in countries like Egypt (Oh, Eom, & Rao, 2015; Lim, 2012; Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011) and Spain (Gerbaudo, 2012), and contrastingly low citizen involvement in social media for politics in countries like Finland (Strandberg, 2013), whereas America experiences a large amount of product marketing and consumerism through social media (Schiller, 1996). What triggers social media usage and success is heavily dependent on the cultural setting and social context in which it is used. Hence, studying the motivations of social media users and cultural dimensions driving their participation would help the platform providers to design and target audiences accordingly.

Each of the cultural dimensions will have influences on the social media participation motivation differently. A particular country may have one cultural dimension supporting pro-social motivations whereas another dimension prohibiting such behavior. Since we cannot assign exact weightage to the impact of each dimension, it will not be possible to determine which country will participate more in pro-social or personal need related behaviors. However, the author will analyze the propositions with respect to the country's cultural dimension scores. Western countries, with analytic cultures, are expected to show greater personal needs oriented reasons behind social media usage whereas Eastern holistic countries are likely to have opposite

cultural trends with altruistic needs (Nisbett, 2001). We will try to evaluate whether community-based activities versus individualistic activities on social media can be drawn back to the cultural dimensions—and a step further, Eastern and Western societies.

There are multiple case studies of social media usage conducted in various countries and platforms (Yates & Paquette, 2011; Miguéns, Baggio, & Costa, 2008; Dabner, 2012; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Gu & Widén-Wulff, 2011). At the end of this article, the author will study some cases from the social media literature, conducted in different countries, as secondary data to analyze the propositions and its implications in the field. It is interesting to bring the two managerial fields: social media from information systems and cross-cultural studies, together to examine the influence of one on another. The classification of motivations based on pro-social behaviors and personal needs has been drawn to understand how different cultures may have completely different sets of motivations driving similar behaviors and social media activities. The implications are important for social media platform providers and managers in order to evaluate the participation motivations in various cultures and what features of the project can enhance or reduce the enthusiasm of contributors.

Research Motivation: Social Media Usage and Motivations

As per January 2016 records, social media users have risen to as high as 2.3 billion, with a penetration percentage of 31%, comprising of almost two-thirds of Internet users (Global Social Media Research¹). Social media is used by people across the globe for multiple purposes, like sharing information about products, political messages, disaster recovery, everyday news, personal experiences, and reconnecting with friends and colleagues. Different kinds of motivations have been studied by researchers to understand these various kinds of social media activities.

With the massive interest in social media and user-generated content on online sites, such as Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, and Wikipedia, huge numbers of consumers are regularly contributing to the marketing and consumer content (Heinonen, 2011). A study to understand what motivates consumers to create and share brand and product related facts is a desire for information, entertainment, and a chance of being rewarded (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011). Krishnamurthy and Dou (2008) observed two kinds of motivations: rational motives, including information sharing and knowledge creation; and emotional motives, like community participation and self-actualization. Other motivations include socialization, enjoyment, reputation and status, and knowledge seeking tendency (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). Online social capital and psychological well-being are among other motivations (Chi, 2011).

Although social media sites are majorly used for entertainment and personal information exchange, there is growing knowledge sharing for political and other news (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). The platforms have provided the public with a magical ability to communicate, coordinate, and collectively act towards a common political goal, majorly seen through the political uprisings and successful mass movements carried out across the globe (Shirky, 2011). The series of civil revolution in the Arab Springs, with the over-throwing of existing governments in Tunisia and Egypt, civil war in Libya, and local protests in Algeria, Morocco, Syria, and Yemen, have been credited to social media and its power to connect masses (Howard, Duffy, Freelon, Hussain, Mari, & Maziad, 2011).

¹ Retrieved from <http://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/>.

Social media has been critically used during disasters due to its capacity to spread information rapidly across thousands of users and connect with people and resources fast (Gao, Barbier, & Goolsby, 2011). For example, knowledge sharing through social media played a key role in the 2010 Haitian earthquake disaster management (Yates & Paquette, 2011). Social volunteerism is a phenomenon observed when individuals actively participate during crisis period by sharing and connecting with others through Twitter, Facebook, etc. The motivations behind such activities are mostly self-fulfillment and growth of social capital (Starbird, 2011).

Several other studies have found that students and young users find the social networking sites using for learning and educational purposes. The chief attraction and motivations behind students using these sites for studying are side-by-side existence of study materials and leisure (Silius, Miilumäki, Huhtamäki, Tebest, Meriläinen, & Pohjolainen, 2010). Other motivations are self-regulated learning, through formal and informal methods (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). Another interesting use of social media is tourism information and tour organization (Parra-López, 2011). Studies have found personal benefit related motivations for both these uses, since these individuals are participating for information needs and meeting the personal enjoyment related goal of travelling. The most influential factor of social media participation is enjoyment (Lin & Lu, 2011). Gaining entertainment-related information, sharing opinions, enjoying information, images and videos shared by others, and staying connected with the online community, all fall under the motivation related to personal enjoyment and entertainment. Playing online games is also among the popular activities of entertainment (Yee, 2006).

Research has been conducted to understand motivations for different platforms. Figure 1 has the images of the typical pages of the two most popular platforms. As per April 2016 records, Facebook is the most popular social media platform, followed by Twitter, closely followed by LinkedIn and Pinterest, and others include Google Plus, Tumbler, and Instagram. Quan-Haase and Young's (2010) study found that the motivating factors behind Facebook use are enjoyment (when it is used as leisure, attraction, and for information about fashion trends) and sociability (connecting with friends and for sharing problems with others). Peer communications and engagement with social members are among other motives (Park et al., 2009). Other studies include the case of Twitter that finds need-for-information and entertainment as the two key motivations (Witkemper, Lim, & Waldburger, 2012). MySpace users have been found to be mostly motivated for social reasons, like keeping in touch with friends; enjoyment reasons, like sharing information and knowing latest news, and for gaining information (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008).

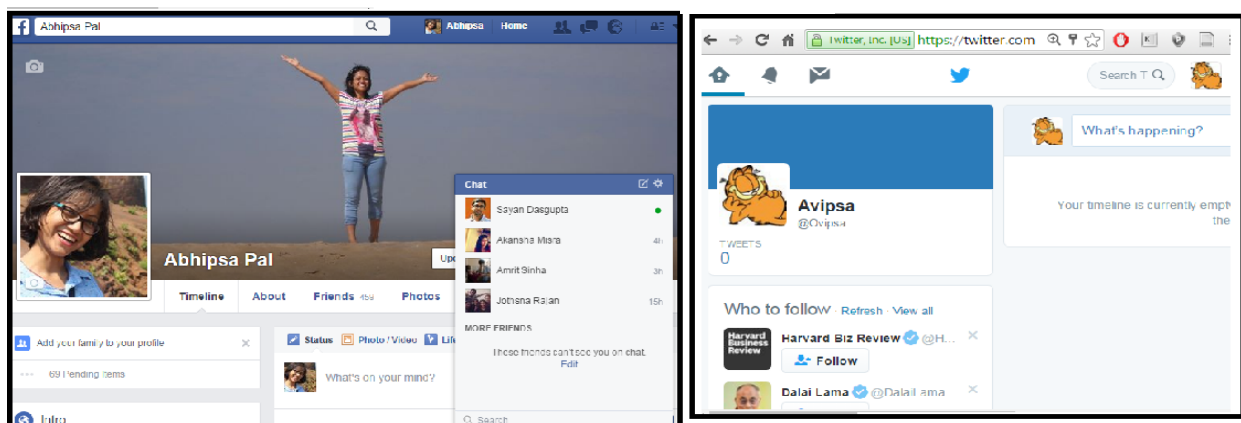


Figure 1. Screenshots of profile pages of Facebook and Twitter.

Academic studies related to social media usage and motivations span across various platforms, like Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, and across countries, like Taiwan (Chi, 2011), Spain (Gerbaudo, 2012), Egypt (Oh et al., 2015; Lim, 2012), United States (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Kim, Sohn, & Choi, 2011), China (Men & Tsai, 2013), Libya (Wilson & Dunn, 2011), and many more. However, there has not been any study identifying the motivational factors across the different cultural boundaries. The next section of this paper categorizes the above motivations and activities into two kinds, pro-social and personal needs, in order to predict the cultural impacts on the motivations driving social media usage.

Theoretical Background: Motivations for Social Media Usage—Pro-social and Personal Needs

Studies have identified various motivations and needs that drive social media participations as seen in the previous section, these include factors like reputation, enjoyment, altruism, community identity, and future rewards. Literature has classified them as intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, where intrinsic motivation consists of internal psychological factors and extrinsic motivations are related to rewards and benefits (Hars & Ou, 2001). In this paper, a pro-social versus personal needs analysis is required for the understanding of cultural influences on these motivations. Pro-social motivation is different from intrinsic needs as it excludes personal needs oriented factors, like enjoyment and learning.

There are multiple evidences, in both business and public contexts, of people displaying a pro-social motivation and working towards the benefit of others for making a positive societal difference, even if it is not within his/her job responsibilities or fetches direct rewards (Grant, 2007). The pro-social drive is rooted in altruism and identification with the community. Hars and Ou (2001) observed these motivations as intrinsic and causes of participation in open developments, and we borrow from their categorizations and extend it to social media. Peer-to-peer interactions and connections with social media members are a major reason behind participation (Park et al., 2009). Altruism, a behavior seen in individuals participating in disaster recovery or content creation in social media platform, is a kind of intrinsic need of a person where he/she feels an urge to participate in the welfare of others. When individuals identify themselves with a community, they start perceiving the members as in-group and align their own goals with them. This kind of motivation, corresponding to Maslow's (1943) needs of belonging and love, can drive individuals to contribute to and participate in social media if they perceive the other community members as in-group. This motivation is seen in the Facebook users who primarily use it to connect with people they know and want to belong to the group (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Seidman, 2013). Lin (2008) defined social capital as "resources embedded in one's social networks, resources that can be accessed or mobilized through ties in the network" (p. 51). Social capital has been recognized as a chief factor driving social media participations. The phenomenon of digital volunteerism, when people willingly participate in disaster recovery, is related to altruistic motivations that build social capital (Starbird, 2011). User interactivity and social connectivity are most influential factors when social media is used for marketing and consumer information exchange (Chi, 2011). In summary, use of social media for building social capital, connectivity, communication, volunteerism, and belongingness within a community are all related to altruistic pro-social motivations.

Personal needs include factors like personal enjoyment, career development, and learning. Fun and enjoyment has been the most popular intrinsic motivational factor for social media use (Lin & Lu, 2011). Entertainment, which is related to fun and relaxation by interacting and connecting with other users, is a

predominant motivational cause (Lampe Wash, Velasquez, & Ozkaya, 2010). The vast use of social media for tourism, conducting tours and travels, and seeking fashion related data serve as enjoyment and fun activities (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Playing online games through social media with other users of the community has also been observed recently, as gaming industry is targeting customers through these platforms (Deterding, 2012; Yee, 2006). Other intrinsic factors include learning and education, another frequent reason behind social media use observed in multiple studies (Moran, Seaman, & Tinti-Kane, 2011; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). This can be extended to need-for-information, another key factor driving social media usage (Witkemper et al., 2012). Psychological well-being refers to mental cognitive judgments of one's self-esteem and personal satisfaction (Diener, Suh, & Oishi, 1997). Barker (2009) found how social networking sites help in building self-esteem for young users. Other researchers have found a positive link between social media usage and user's psychological well-being (Chi, 2011), as it meets an individual's innate psychological needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Both need-for-information and entertainment are the two key motivations found in a Twitter study (Witkemper et al., 2012), which are linked to personal needs oriented motivations. MySpace users have been enjoying the platform by sharing and seeking information, knowing latest news, and communicating with others (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). Comprising of both enjoyment and self-development based goals, social media usage for learning, information, entertainment, and fulfilling psychological needs is all influenced by personal needs oriented motivations.

External rewards have also been found to influence intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1971) and may directly or indirectly impact both categories of motivations depending on what kind of reward it is. The positive feedback and praises from community members are rewards that impact pro-social motivations. On the other hand, rewards of career development from learning and education through social media are kind of external rewards that constitute personal benefit related motivations. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations guide social media participation (Sweetser & Kelleher, 2011; Kietzmann et al., 2011). Another interesting point to be noted is related to informational use of social media. While need-for-information motivation, which makes individuals use social media to seek and gain data (for example, reading news and educational materials), is personal needs oriented, the information sharing activities (like posting on the site for others to view, commenting on friends' shared files, and participation in political activities) are pro-social.

The pro-social and personal needs oriented motivations, as explained, are listed in Table 1 below. Social media usage is rising steadily across the globe. Therefore, how national cultures may be influencing the motivations behind the participation is interesting to study. Two individuals using social media extensively can be driven by completely different sets of motivational needs. This paper aims to understand the extent of cultural impact on the two types of motivational needs discussed.

Table 1

Motivations for Social Media Usage—Pro-social vs. Personal Needs

Pro-social motivations	Personal needs oriented motivations
Altruism	Enjoyment and entertainment
Belongingness and identification with community	Need-for-information
Social capital	Learning and education
Peer communication and recognition	Self-esteem
Volunteerism	Personal satisfaction
Connectivity and interactions	
Information sharing	

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Impact on Motivation

Hofstede's (1984b) research on cross-cultural dimensions spanning countries from all over the world is seminal. The dimensions are most popular measures for cross-cultural research in organizational behavior, with Google Scholar citations for the original work exceeding 4,000 and the consequent paper on time orientation also exceeding 4,000 citations. However, there have been no studies to understand social media usage motivations based on cultural background. This article therefore attempts to understand whether Hofstede's cultural dimensions will affect the motivations driving an individual to contribute to open projects.

Hofstede theorized that there were four primary dimensions, which could differentiate the cultures of our world, and later, added a fifth dimension for future orientation that was observed in Eastern cultures. The five dimensions and their impacts on motivations are as follows.

Individualism-Collectivism

Individualism is defined by people who think about themselves and immediate families, whereas collectivism is defined by people who believe in in-group members to look after them and vice versa. This is the most used dimension in academic research (Taras, Kirkman, & Steel, 2010). Collective cultures are likely to display pro-social behaviors and motivations to be identified with their in-group would drive them to use social media.

Power Distance

"It indicates the extent which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally" (Hofstede, 1980, p. 45). Societies high on this dimension easily accept the hierarchy of powers, whereas ones with low scores prefer equality of power across organizations. Power distance would influence an individual's personal need based motivations to work in an open environment with no power structures, where all users can participate equally. The Arab Springs movement shows successful leaderless revolutions.

Uncertainty Avoidance

A society with high uncertainty avoidance feels threatened by ambiguity and uncertainty and does not encourage spontaneity. They prefer formal rules, consider time as highly valuable, and try to avoid anxiety and fear. Participating in political uprisings, volunteering for disasters, and keeping connected with the community are features of cultures preferring uncertainty avoidance. Societies with low uncertainty avoidance are prone to take risks, have fewer rules to guide them, and assign lesser value for time. Enjoyment, entertainment, tourism, playing games, and reading current news are spontaneous activities without promise of future certainty.

Masculinity-Femininity

Masculine society values advancement, income, training, and competition, whereas feminine values include friendliness, security, quality of life, personal relationships, service, care for the weak, and solidarity (Hofstede, 1994; Taras et al., 2010). Masculine societies are likely to be motivated by personal needs since they value individual success highly, in contrast to feminine societies who value relationships and care for others.

Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation

A fifth dimension “Long-Term versus Short-Term Orientation” was added (Hofstede & Bond, 1988) later, which was initially termed as the Confucian Work Dynamism, since it was observed in Chinese and other Eastern cultures. Long-term oriented cultures prefer to plan ahead for the future, whereas short-term oriented ones are leaned towards immediate results (Bond et al., 2004). Peer recognition, connectivity, and identity with community are long-term goals that should motivate cultures high on long-term orientations. On the other hand, enjoyment, self-esteem, and personal satisfaction are comparatively short-term goals.

Research Objectives: Cultural Influence on Motivation for Social Media Usage

Motivation is the answer to why people act in a certain manner and what guides them to do something (e.g., Atkinson, 1958). The Western motivation is mostly derived from within, the motive to enhance one’s self-esteem, to achieve, and to self-actualize, whereas Eastern cultures with collectivist societies derive their motivations from socially oriented achievement, affiliation, and power (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This implies that cultures affect motivations of individuals. While some studies have explored the link between motivation and dimensions of culture, the author would explore the two categories of motivations: pro-social and personal needs oriented motivations, which would drive social media usage by individuals from different cultures.

Individualism-Collectivism and Motivations for Social Media Usage

Social media users have a mix of extrinsic motives like future career, and intrinsic motives like their fun, helping others, and own development (Bitzer, Schrettl, & Schröder, 2007). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations have been related to collectivism and individualism dimensions while comparing Eastern and Western societies (Ahuvia, 2002). People from collectivist cultures identify themselves with their group or community, identity in the society, and perform tasks with societal goals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Therefore, collectivism would be pro-social as they are motivated by altruism and volunteerism (tasks for others’ goals), identification with their group, and group member’s recognition. Individualists are independent, have their personal goals, and act in autonomous ways (Triandis, 2001). Use of social media for fun and enjoyment is a trait that is likely to be exhibited by someone who is independent of in-group or societal pressures, in line with an individualist. Education and learning are personal goals of a person, since they either benefit only himself or his immediate family. Personal satisfaction and growth of self-esteem are also intrinsic motivations observed by people from individualistic cultures. Thus, the motivations observed in individualists are primarily personal needs oriented. In summation, we can say that social media participants in collectivist cultures are driven by pro-social motivations, while users from individualist societies are motivated by personal needs. Therefore, we put forward our first proposition as follows:

Proposition 1: Social media users from collectivist societies are driven by pro-social motivations, whereas users from individualistic societies are driven by personal needs oriented motivations.

Power Distance and Motivations for Social Media Usage

Social media offers a community-based platform allowing an open access of data for the public, resulting in an open environment used for open government related models and open data purposes (Lee & Kwak, 2012). However, the user profiles and social networks created do build a new power inequality that has been observed in online social networks, like social media sites and weblogs through inequality in social capital (Shirky, 2003;

Lin, 2000). Power inequality is not a concern for cultures with high power distance (Hofstede et al., 1991). They accept hierarchy as an existential fact that cannot be changed, and someone in power controls the society (Hofstede, 1980). Therefore, people working in such cultures are likely to accept the power hierarchy formed due to the imbalances of social capital in social media. However, they would be motivated to participate for pro-social needs involving connecting with community members, following the online leaders (for example, ones with greater followers in Twitter), and building networks. They would further aim to increase their social capital by greater participation, and thus, gain a higher rank in the established online hierarchy. Contrastingly, people from low power distance cultures do not enjoy hierarchy or power inequality, and support equal rights of all (Hofstede, 1980). They would therefore enjoy social media only when it does not exert additional power structures. Since self-esteem in these societies is not dependent on existing power levels, individuals would pursue greater personal satisfaction through social media. Low power distance thus implies social media usage by individuals influenced by their personal needs oriented motivations. We thus present the following proposition:

Proposition 2: Social media users from cultures with high power distance are driven by pro-social motivations, whereas the users from low power distance cultures are driven by personal needs oriented motivations.

Furthermore, Kirkman, G. Chen, Farh, Z. X. Chen, and Lowe (2009) suggested that higher power distance will result in greater citizenship behavior of people implying political involvement, thus lesser motivations to perform personal goals like learning and enjoyment.

Uncertainty Avoidance and Motivation for Social Media Usage

Cultures high on uncertainty avoidance consider uncertainty as a threat, work hard to ensure stability, follow rules and norms, and believe that “ordinary citizens are incompetent compared with authorities” (Hofstede, 1980, p. 47). Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance are likely to participate in political uprisings, digital volunteering for disasters, and socialization with the community members. Societies with low uncertainty avoidance are prone to take risks, have fewer rules to guide them, and assign lesser value for time. Enjoyment, entertainment, tourism, playing games and reading current news are spontaneous activities without promise of future certainty.

Anxiety and fear are typical features of individuals from high uncertainty avoiding environments, and this would lead them to build relationships and help others in the expectation of reciprocal help at the times of crisis. Working to aid the society at times of crisis—political or natural disasters—is an attempt to prevent further damages in the future. Hence, altruistic motivations are likely to guide them in social media participation. Cultures that show weak uncertainty avoidance accept uncertainty as a reality and take risks in life. Motivations for social media usage would be from entertaining yet temporary achievements, through playing games, conducting tours, and simply browsing for enjoyment. We thus present the following proposition:

Proposition 3: Social media users from cultures with high uncertainty avoidance are driven by pro-social motivations, whereas users from low power distance cultures are driven by personal needs oriented motivations.

Masculinity-Femininity and Motivations for Social Media Usage

Masculine societies consist of people who focus more on materialistic gains, individual achievements, career ambitions, competitions, and performance (Hofstede, 1984b; Lee & Peterson, 2001). Materialistic rewards related to participation in social media networks are entertainment, psychological fulfillment, self-esteem, and informal learning (Diener et al., 1997; Witkemper et al., 2012). Learning and education are linked with rewards through career development and self-improvement. These factors imply that masculine cultures show personal needs oriented motivations behind social media usage. On the contrary, feminine cultures have individuals who focus on societal harmony, relationship with important others, material success is less virtue, and competition not encouraged (Hofstede, 1984a; Lee & Peterson, 2001). Social media users extensively participate for building social connections, help others in distress through volunteerism, desiring for belongingness in the community, and helping other members by sharing information. When these kinds of pro-social motivations dominate the social media activities of individuals, they are likely to belong to feminine cultures—motivations directly identifying with the cultural traits. We therefore present the following proposition:

Proposition 4: Social media users from masculine cultures are driven by personal needs oriented motivations, whereas users from feminine cultures are driven by pro-social motivations.

Long-Term/Short-Term Orientation and Motivations for Social Media Usage

In long-term oriented cultures, along with planning in advance for the future, respecting social codes and family life is considered of primary importance, and obtaining stability (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Building social capital and connecting with community members can be traced to future planning and want for stability, and respect for social customs is related to identification with the community. These imply pro-social motivations. In a culture where following social norms are essential, affiliation by community members and identity with the community should be the most significant drivers for social media activities visible to others. Short-term oriented cultures are identified by need for immediate gratification, freedom, rights, achievement, and individualistic thinking (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). The factors related personal needs based motivations are directly in line with these traits from individuals from short-term oriented culture. Active participation for enjoyment leads to immediate gratification, unsupervised learning is form of achievements with freedom, and activities that do not relate to appreciation from community members portray individualistic thinking. We thus put forward the following proposition:

Proposition 5: Social media users from long-term oriented cultures are driven by pro-social motivations, whereas the users from short-term oriented cultures are driven by personal needs oriented motivations.

Table 2

Effect of Cultural Dimensions on Motivations: A Summary of Propositions

Propositions	Pro-social motivations	Personal needs oriented motivations
Proposition 1	Collectivists	Individualists
Proposition 2	High power distance	Low power distance
Proposition 3	High uncertainty avoidance	Low uncertainty avoidance
Proposition 4	Femininity	Masculinity
Proposition 5	Long-term oriented	Short-term oriented

Table 2 presents the summary of the propositions and effect of cultural dimensions on motivations guiding social media usage. It should be noted that a particular culture may show conflicting motivations (pro-social and personal needs). For example, a country may be long-term oriented and thus guided by pro-social motivations, but individualistic hence should also be personal needs oriented. Both the motivations will be then affecting social media usage. Countries may be strong in the polar end in one of the dimensions and weak in others. In such cases, cultural dimension with highest (or lowest) score will be responsible for greatest impact.

Analysis of the Cultural Dimensions for the Motivations: Examples of Countries

Table 2, based on the propositions, implies that individuals from cultural background of collectivism, high power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, high femininity, and long-term orientation, are likely to be guided by pro-social motivations. These dimensions are typically those of Eastern countries. For example, China is high on these cultural dimensions (except femininity), whereas Nepal is high on another four dimensions excluding long-term orientation, and Singapore fulfils all the above dimensions. It is likely that social media users from Eastern countries would participate for gaining respect and appreciation from their society, or merely because they feel altruistic towards their community members and consider it as their “duty” to help the society through volunteerism, sharing political views and information, and altruism. Table 3 presents the detailed cultural scores of the countries.

Individualist, low power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and short-term orientation are characteristics for personal needs oriented motivations. Many Western countries would exhibit these cultures. Canada and Australia meet the requirement on all five dimensions (though uncertainty avoidance at borderline for Australia), United States’ cultural scores are in line with four of these dimensions except masculinity. Egypt has cultural scores of high collectivism, high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, and feminist traits, all hinting towards pro-social motivations. Evidences supporting this can be drawn from the revolution of Egypt that was executed using Twitter and Facebook (Oh et al., 2015).

Table 3

Country Scores for Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions

Country	Individualism (below 50 indicates collectivism)	Power distance	Uncertainty avoidance	Masculinity (below 50 indicates femininity)	Long-term orientation (below 50 indicates short-term orientation)
China	20	80	30	66	87
Nepal	30	65	40	40	0
Singapore	20	74	8	48	72
Taiwan	17	58	69	45	93
Canada	80	39	48	52	36
Australia	90	36	51	61	21
India	48	77	40	56	51
Indonesia	14	78	48	46	62
Egypt	25	70	80	45	7
United States	91	40	46	42	26
Japan	46	54	92	95	88
Thailand	20	64	64	34	32

There are countries like India and Indonesia having moderate scores in most of the cultural dimensions, hence it cannot be said with certainty whether individuals from these countries use social media for pro-social or personal needs reasons. It might vary from one person to another, about which cultural dimensions have maximum influence on him. An individual from such a country might be driven by any of the motivations based on the interacting and conflicting effects of the dimensions.

Research Methodology

To test the propositions, the author is looking into existing empirical research data conducted by researchers in the field of social media usage and motivations, to find the motivations behind the participations. Such empirical data are collected in a cultural setting, which can be used to find scores on cultural dimensions and verify the motivations of participants as recorded in the cases. Since none of the papers have focused on motivations and culture, there is a data insufficiency to verify all propositions. Next, the author proposes a methodology empirically test the data in future.

Pre-test Research Data

Google Scholar search for keywords including “social media”, “social media usage”, “social media motivations”, and “social media case study” was done to find research findings related to motivations behind social media use. Certain academic papers have shown interesting outcomes with respect to our propositions. The author found the country-specific scores of the cultural dimensions from Hofstede’s official website (<http://geert-hofstede.com/united-states.html>).

Taiwan study. A study is conducted by Chi (2011) to explore the efficiency of social media marketing by understanding the impact of user motivation. The data were collected through a survey of 502 college students from Shih Hsin University in Taipei, Taiwan. Taiwan has all cultural scores that support pro-social motivations. This study found that the two major user motivations driving online social media usage are social capital and psychological well-being (pro-social motivations), thus supporting all the five propositions of this paper.

American versus Korean users study. The comparative study of American and Korean students’ social networking usage patterns reveals that “socially close others (e.g., families and close friends) were only a minor part of American respondents’ online social networks, while they reached 70% of Korean respondents’ networks” (Kim et al., 2011, p. 371), therefore in line with our propositions suggesting pro-social motivations for Korea over America. The same study reveals higher scores for construct “seeking social support” for Korean respondents above Americans.

Political activities in Finland compared to Egypt. Finland is a country with cultural dimensions supporting personal needs oriented motivations, except for uncertainty avoidance, which too is slightly above the borderline. A research was conducted to observe user behaviors during Finnish parliamentary elections as social media was used for election campaign (Strandberg, 2013). The study found that although the candidates tried social media to impact the voting and the citizens did use social media extensively for other activities, its influence on campaign and voting decisions was very low. In line with our Propositions 1, 2, 4, and 5, Finnish citizens use social media for pro-social causes of political activities, but uses social media mostly for personal needs. On the other hand, Egypt with cultural scores supporting pro-social motivations has multiple evidences of political activities of citizens through social media (Oh et al., 2015; Lim, 2012; Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011).

Japan's disaster recovery study. Japan's cultural scores are parallel to Eastern cultures hinting pro-social motives, with the exception of high score in the masculinity dimension. During the March 11, 2011 earthquake in Tsukuba, Japan, when all other communication channels and electricity were down, Twitter on mobile devices was used to spread urgent information and it played a significant role in disaster recovery (Kaigo, 2012). The digital volunteerism and altruism displayed by the citizens of Japan through Twitter explains how pro-social motivations have been guiding them in the activities.

United States tourism study. A study focusing on travel destinations in the United States found that social media comprises of a considerable part of the online tourism domain and is also extensively used by users to plan trips and organize tours (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Other than the high score in the cultural dimension of femininity, the US is a country that should be guided by personal needs based motivations. Tours and travels are majorly leisure activities for enjoyment and fun, and when users use social media to do so, it is due to their personal needs.

Since the above studies have not been conducted to comparatively analyze cultural distinctions and motivations for social media use across cultures, the findings can only suggest logical evidence for our propositions but cannot be complete empirical proof. For instance, the last US-based study shows tourism activities (personal needs oriented motivations) through social media but there is no evidence that such uses are comparatively lesser for a country, say Japan, with culture suggesting pro-social motivations. The following section provides a research methodology to meet the limitations of these secondary data.

Proposed Methodology

Social media platforms have to be selected such that it has participants from countries scoring differently in the different domains. The US and China are polar opposites in individualism, long-term orientation, and power distance. However, they both have moderate scores in the other dimensions. Japan has high scores for masculinity and uncertainty avoidance. Thailand interestingly is feminine. Therefore, projects should be chosen such that it has contributors from varied countries, like the US, China, Japan, and Thailand (referring to Table 3 for scores). These countries are mere examples. The selection of the countries should be done in a systematic manner such that they are both culturally significant and have a considerable presence in social media, with significant Internet penetration. Some countries, like Bhutan, are culturally strong with respect to high power distance score, but do not have many IT related participation. Such a country should not be chosen. Once the set of countries to be studied has been decided, the survey can be circulated within the social media sites and its users for those countries, with mandatory field for cultural background and nationality.

A mechanism to find suitable respondents is by visiting the social media sites and identifying their nationalities from their profiles, and ensuring that they have ample presence in the site. We should try to avoid a high US-based sample like many previous studies, since Western males are generally the highest Internet users and hence easy sample. We can communicate with the chosen respondents through the messengers of the social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) or emails if it is given in their profile, and send them the questionnaire to understand their motivations. The questions can be directly connected to our motivational factors. This would make the survey short with greater chances of response.

A few examples of platforms where users from different nationalities participate are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Instagram. Researcher may seek help from current users who are members of the social networking sites since they would have greater connections and higher chances of response from their own online community members.

Practical Implications: What India Can Learn

An analysis is critical to users who intend to use social media for a purpose. These include election candidates, product marketing executives, and government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) conducting social work through public help, among others.

A country like India, predominantly driven by pro-social motivations, is likely to have citizens responding to disaster recovery or other social service related volunteerism at times of crisis. Government and NGOs may then use social media to communicate with citizens and disseminate information rapidly, as seen in the case of Japan earthquake (Kaigo, 2012). Aspiring electoral candidates in India may also use social media for campaigning during elections, since the citizens are likely to be politically engaged through social media. The Jallikattu protest in Tamil Nadu is an example of political mass activism spread through Facebook and Twitter. Another example is the “Free Basics” campaign by Facebook in India, which targeted the pro-social motivations of the citizens with slogans like “A First Step towards Digital Equality” and “Support a Connected India”.

Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Scope

Millions of users across the globe are using social media for various activities, like connecting with friends, sharing information, managing disasters, entertainment, education and learning, and others. This paper studies the motivations of social media usage through different research cases and understands how culture is affecting the motivations—pro-social and personal needs oriented—that drive users. Cultural dimensions defined by Hofstede are used to propose a cultural perspective on these motivations. Propositions developed suggest that countries with high collectivism, high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, high masculinity, and long-term orientations will use social media driven by pro-social needs whereas countries with high individualism, low power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, high femininity, and short-term orientations have users driven by personal needs oriented motivations. Results of previous studies show the logical evidence for the propositions.

One major limitation of this paper is when it comes to cultures where there is a conflict of motivations, as given above under the cases of India and Indonesia, with moderate scores in most dimensions. Similar issues are faced in countries with dimensional scores such that one suggests pro-social motives while others suggest personal needs. A suggestion for resolving this is given below. Another issue is with the factors under the two motivation groups. In a few cases, the author found that “information seeking” is for pro-social needs, like knowing about the society and community, although it should ideally be a personal need oriented activity. The secondary data from other academic papers are also not sufficient as empirical evidence since none of those observations were made using cultural lenses.

This paper has numerous future research angles. Firstly, in spite of its popularity, there are numerous critiques on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (McSweeney, 2002). Other scholars have developed different cultural models. For instance, Markus and Kitayama (1991) developed a cultural framework that can also be used to understand the effect of motivations. Secondly, future research can aim to understand the effects of the different dimensions of cultures on motivations differently. For example, individualism-collectivism dimension might be responsible for maximum impact on pro-social and personal needs motivations for open participation, whereas, say, uncertainty avoidance has the least impact. This kind of impact analysis would help us solve some

of the issues related to conflict for countries with mixed cultural scores, choosing the most impacting score. Another interesting direction could be breaking up the various factors under pro-social motivations to understand each one's interaction with culture. In the beginning of the paper, the author identified various factors and categorized them under pro-social versus personal needs related motivations. It would be interesting to analyze each or the most influential factor in case of social media usage, like some previous papers have done.

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