



The Role of Culture in Consumer-Generated Content Engagement: A Cross-Cultural Examination of 'Liking', Commenting, Sharing, and Creating Posts About Brands on Facebook

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English Summary

With the convenient use of social networking sites (SNSs) for consumers around the world, consumer-generated content has become part of our everyday life. This authentic content about brands created by consumers (or brand related user-generated content: Br-UGC) is very influential in consumers' decision making. Nevertheless, consumers in different cultures do not necessarily respond or interact with Br-UGC in the same way considering that individual motivations, social relationships, and communication styles are influenced by the sociocultural system to which they belong. Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is to investigate the determinant factors of Br-UGC engagement on SNSs, and specifically how the acts of 'liking', commenting, sharing, and posting content about brands on Facebook differ across cultures.

Based on consumers' responses of over 800 Facebook users living in two Eastern collectivistic cultures (South Korea, Thailand) and Western individualistic (the Netherlands and the United States), main conclusions about cultural influence on Br-UGC engagement can be drawn in four aspects: (1) motivations, (2) source relationships, (3) audience relationships, and (4) content characteristics of Br-UGC.

Cultural Influence on Consumers' Motivations for Br-UGC Engagement

Based on a qualitative study, seven motivations for engaging with Br-UGC can be identified: information seeking, entertainment, personal identity and presentation, remuneration, social integration, empowerment, and intention to try or purchase. While the first six motivations have been found in previous studies, the intention to try or purchase a product is a new motivation that emerged from this study primarily among Korean and Thai collectivistic consumers. Particularly, when consumers in these cultures 'like', comment on, and share content about brands, they tend to signal their purchase intention to their friends. Another apparent cultural difference emerged when consumers create and publish their own

content. The difference concerns individuals' desire to interact with other (social integration motivation) and enhance their self-image (personal identity and presentation motivation). For Korean and Thai collectivistic consumers, friends tend to be the most influential determinant that influences their creation of brand posts. In their opinion, publishing content about brands allows them to strengthen relationships with existing friends or gain/provide emotional support from/to in-group friends. In contrast, for Dutch and American individualistic consumers, the desire to express their own decision or personal taste and interests tends to be more prominent. These findings are particularly important to online marketers who operate in different markets considering that the underlying motivations for engaging with Br-UGC differ as a result of culture. Specifically, the motivation concerning social integration appears to be the key factor that differentiates Br-UGC engagement among consumers in collectivistic and individualistic cultures.

Cultural Influence on Source Relationships and Br-UGC Engagement

My experimental study shows that, in both cultures, the strength of a tie with a source positively affects 'liking', commenting, and sharing Br-UGC on Facebook. However, the likelihood of engagement differs as a result of cultural differences. Specifically, consumers in collectivistic cultures are more likely to comment on Br-UGC created by close friends and family than consumers in individualistic cultures. This suggests that consumers in collectivistic cultures tend to make a comment on other's post in order to connect with their close relations, however, consumers in individualistic cultures are more likely to connect with a wider network in order to have discussions with a larger group. This provides support to the focus of group-orientation that is more emphasized in Korean and Thai advertising campaigns or messages.

Cultural Influence on Audience Relationships and Br-UGC Engagement

Source relationships not only influence the likelihood of Br-UGC engagement, but our audiences on a SNS also affect the creation of brand posts. Based on the survey study, it shows that, in both cultures, the diversity in a SNS (which can include family, close friends, acquaintances, and even strangers) positively affects the intensity of SNS use and consequently the creation of brand-related posts. When it comes to cultural differences, culture does affect the degree of diversity of one's audience. Users in individualistic cultures have a more diverse audience than those living in collectivistic cultures. Consequently, a more diverse network leads to the activeness and the frequency of engaging in SNS activities (e.g., brand posts creation). Specifically, on the one hand, the creation of brand posts has become a means for consumers in individualistic cultures to exchange product-related information with a variety of people. On the other hand, consumers from collectivistic cultures prefer to have a less diverse network and are less likely to post personal information to all their contacts on SNSs, leading to lower SNS use and consequently less brand posts creation. The findings add to our understanding that a company who operates in Western market should provide a function or a channel where consumers can freely share their experiences about a product and get people with diverse interests involved. This would facilitate the company to increase authentic content generated by real consumers and widely spread the word about the brand.

Cultural Influence on Consumer Engagement with Different Content Characteristics

Based on my online experiment, brand posts that are considered highly helpful, entertaining, and contains more elements of sociability, appears to increase engagement ('like', comment, share) with the posts. When it comes to cultural influence, consumers from individualistic cultures indicate a higher likelihood of sharing and making a comment on social Br-UGC than consumers from collectivistic cultures. Nevertheless, the posts

consumers from individualistic cultures create appear to contain fewer elements of sociability compared to the posts created by consumers from collectivistic cultures. The results support the notion that, for consumers in individualistic cultures, sharing and commenting on social brand-related posts tends to reflect their desire to extend their network and to exchange information about products, while placing less emphasis on maintaining their relationships. In contrast, consumers in collectivistic cultures actively take part in sharing their experiences with brands or giving helpful information or recommendations in order to strengthen relationships with existing friends.