THE INTERSECTION OF CULTURAL DIMENSIONS, SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AND CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION

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Abstract. The role of social media in today's life is almost imperative. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram or Youtube are widely used all over the world. Above all, social media has become a global phenomenon, which has dramatically changed the concept of cross-cultural communication not only between individuals, but also brands and consumers. Varieties of social media platforms provide a new channel to acquire information through peer communication, thus influencing consumer purchase intention. Although diverse cultures have different cultural backgrounds, they affect the acceptance of social media usage. In order to broaden the understanding of this rapidly changing field, this paper provides a framework, based on Hofstede's dimensions and Technology Acceptance model, for examining the intersection of cultural differences, social media usage and consumer behaviour to set the agenda for future research.

Key words: *social media, cultural dimensions, consumer purchase intention, consumer behaviour.*

Introduction

The perception of consumer behavior has always been one of the core components in marketing literature. Social media with its large selection of communication and advertising tools is making a huge influence on purchasing decision (Grover and Mandan, 2017; Cao, Meister and Klante, 2014). However, with such advancements in individuals and brands' communication, the need for the further examination of cultural impact arise. Nonetheless, there is a lack of scientific literature on how this cutting-edge media coupled with its international appeal and most important, its impact on purchase behavior. Thus, this paper puts forth a conceptual model that utilizes Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (2010) and Technology Acceptance Model (1989).

Relevance of the article

Consumer behavior faces dynamic changes determined by exposure to the latest technological advancements, marketers and researchers face a necessity to seek for a deeper understanding of how widely used social networks affect consumer purchase intentions.

Level of problem investigation

Hogan and Quan-Haase (2010), Hettler (2010) analysed social media as a communication channel. Chen, Chen, Xu (2016), Chen and Lin (2019) identified associations between social media marketing (SMM) and purchase intention. Durmaz, Celik, Oruc (2011), Rehman (2017) and others say that culture affects every aspect of consumers life including his buying behaviour.

Scientific problem - What is the influence of social media on consumer purchase decision in different cultures?

Object of the article – the impact of social media on consumer purchase intention in different cultures.

Aim of the article – to suggest a theoretical model for the evaluation of social media influence on consumer purchase intention in different cultures.

***Objectives of the article*:**
1. To characterize social media as a communication channel.
2. To justify the interaction between social media and the consumer purchase intention.
3. To distinguish the impact of cultural factors on social media usage.
4. To suggest a research framework for examining the intersection of cultural differences, consumer behavior and social media for future research.

Methods of the article: scientific literature analysis, synthesis, systematization and generalization.

1. Literature review
1.1 Social media as a communication channel

The concept of social media has been shaped over the years. Fundamentally, social media is understood as an online-based platform enabling users to generate and share content and allowing subsequent online interactions with other users (Staff *et al*., 2016). Another general definition provided by Bryer and Zavattaro (2011, p.327) is given as "technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration, and enable deliberation across stakeholders". Furthermore, Goodrich and De Mooij (2014) specify that social media refers to a hybrid media in the sense of offering both electronic word of mouth (eWOM) opportunities, as well as serving as a mass media platform for spreading messages.

Complementing the given concept, Stoycheff, Liu, Wibowo and Nanni (2017) emphasize a few most notable features of social media: deinstitutionalisation, dependency on user-generated content and facilitation of two-way interaction with an audience, beyond any one specified recipient. Online platforms, such as social media, contain content that is created and disseminated by the Internet's decentralized sharing structures rather than media organizations. Social media are also closely linked with user-generated content as ordinary individuals are contributing the most to content creation and dissemination; and lastly, social media sites are dynamic, facilitating a two-way interaction with an audience, beyond any individual recipient. In conclusion, social media could therefore be described as an online social interaction phenomenon, which encompasses the sharing of user-generated content between users while also acting as a mass media platform and a strong vessel for eWOM.

In connection with the general definition, a variety of social media types will be further distinguished. With reference to the analysis of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), the major criteria for social media classification relies on a set of theories in the field of media research (social presence/media richness) and social processes (self-presentation / self- disclosure). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) categorize social media into blogs, social networking sites, virtual social worlds, collaborative projects, content communities and virtual game worlds. Hogan and Quan-Haase (2010) have identified classification that is more detailed: into sub-genres of social media into blogs, microblogs, discussion forums, content-sharing sites, bookmarking sites, virtual communities and online review sites. Moreover, Friedman and Friedman (2013) in a more recent study propose social media classification into five broad categories, based on its nature communication, collaboration, community, creativity and convergence. Although there is no definitive typology of social media platforms, the most applicable classification of social media has been made into following categories: blogs (WordPress, Blogger), microblogs (Twitter, Tumblr), social networking sites (Facebook, Google+), direct communication tools (Messenger, Viber, Slack), virtual social worlds (Second Life), content-sharing communities (Instagram), discussion forums (Craigslist, Quora), bookmarking sites (Reddit), online review sites (TripAdvisor, IMDb), collaborative projects (Wikipedia) and virtual game worlds (Minecraft).

Facilitated by the technological development of Internet technology, social media has evolved into a widely used communication channel and powerful communication medium in the 21st century (Hettler, 2010). Users actively create and share information on products and brands on social media sites through forums and content-sharing communities. Several studies have shown that social interaction ties and social media commitment are the most significant elements of social media (Hutter *et al.* 2013; Phang *et al.,* 2013). As a further matter, social media used as a communication tool have a significant impact on individual's social development. According to Leonardi (2015), social media use helps to build awareness of the communication that occurs between peers. Consequently, it contributes to development of a better social adaptation, as well as a sense of social context. However, some negative aspects of social media usage occur as well. As noticed by Kapoor *et al*. (2018), social media provide individuals with an overload of information, which is evident in users' inability to find credible information and thus may lead to increased risk of miscommunication

between users and the spread of disinformation. In conclusion, social media is an online social interaction phenomenon, whose communication functions encompasses the sharing of user-generated content between users while also acting as a mass media platform and a strong vehicle for eWOM.

1.2 Interaction between social media and the consumer purchase intention

The growing importance of social media in society not only affects communication habits but also makes it easier for consumers to obtain information or product attributes or evaluations from acquaintances in their networks. Users can intentionally share brand or product related content in order to express their opinion. Likewise, specific consumer preferences can be displayed unintentionally, for instance, by becoming a fan of a brand, engaging in communication through liking, commenting and sharing content, which includes brand information, without any advertising purpose. At this point, influence occurs in social media communities because members have the control of discovering, producing, sharing as well as distributing information (Chen, Chen, Xu, 2016). Thus, the spread of eWOM may affect consumer behaviour and purchase intentions.

Social media are nowadays considered as the most influential platforms in terms of serving as a medium to engage with consumers, as stated by Fauser (2011). The usage of such sites acts specifically as a source of inspiration and for the evaluation of alternatives. Cao, Meister, Klante (2014) indicate that social media figures, such as bloggers and opinion leaders play an important role inspiring consumers, in addition, providing information, while friends are perceived as good sources during purchase decision process as well as for reconfirmation.

More than any time in the past, the utilization of social media to deliver brand's message has been largely considered by modern business as promising platforms to conduct promotional activities and effectively communicate with the targeted customers. In the study, conducted by Chen and Lin (2019), a strong association was noticed between social media marketing (SMM), participation intention and purchase intention. Authors discovered that SMM has a significant influence on social identification and perceived value, which act as mediating factors, affecting participation intention and purchase intention. In conclusion, social media creates a venue through which electronic word-of-mouth communication, the spread of user-generated content, as well as brand's marketing activities can significantly influence consumers' intentions towards the purchase of goods and services.

1.3 The impact of cultural factors on the usage of social media

In order to determine the extent to which social media influence the need of a product, which is driving the customer towards a purchase decision in different cultures, it is essential to examine the cultural influence on consumer intention to use social media platforms. The essence of culture means the complex of beliefs of human societies, their roles, behaviour, values and traditions. Culture is an extremely important concept to understand consumer behaviour (Durmaz, Celik, Oruc, 2011). Rehman (2017) says that culture affects almost every business and every consumer in any country. Culture forms, feelings and reactions to certain situations, shape the way people think and act and it also impacts the way people use the internet and social media for communication and decision-making process (Bendahou, Berbou, 2015). One of the definitions of culture, frequently reffered to, was put forth by Hofstede (1980) who defined culture as collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one another. The dynamic and ever-changing nature of culture is that every generation adds something of its own to culture before it is passed to the next generation (Ali, Sudan, 2018). Hofstede's cultural dimensions' theory is often used as a framework that describes the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members, and how it relates to behaviour. Five different dimensions can help to describe countries and its members (Table 2).

Table 2

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Dimension	Explanation
Power distance	The degree to which the less powerful members of organizations accept that power is distributed unequally.
Individualism vs. collectivism	Individualism refers to a society in which there is freedom between individuals, people seek individual work or recognition of results. Collectivism refers to a society in which people are integrated into strong, cohesive groups.
Femininity vs. masculinity	Dominating values in masculine society are victory, career and success. Values prevailing in female society concern care for others, family.
Uncertainty avoidance	The extent to which people feel threatened by unstructured and ambiguity.
Long-term orientation vs. short-term orientation	The extent to which a society exhibits a pragmatic, future oriented perspective rather than a conventional historic or short-term perspective.

Source: created by the authors according to Chen, Chen, Xu (2016); De Mooij, Hofstede (2010)

Since consumers in social media come from diverse national cultures, the influence on them might be different. There are communities in social media whose members interact and collaborate with others, who share common interests, have the control of discovering, producing, sharing, and distributing information (Chen, Chen, Xu, 2016). Because community members in social media may come from several countries, their cultural backgrounds might affect the influence occurring in the communities. They react differently when facing conformity pressures caused by individualism/collectivism and power distance specifically. Chen, Chen, Xu (2016) proposed that individualistic cultures impact the influence process negatively, whereas collectivism cultures impact the influence process positively in social media. According to these authors, cultural differences between countries which consumers come from, impact negatively the influence process in consumer communities in social media. Thus, cultural factors do affect usage and consumer behaviour in social media.

Traditional Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Fred Davis in 1986, has been chosen to explain users' behavioural intention to use a technological innovation, in this case social media. The model assumes that an individual's motivation to use technological innovation is determined by three factors: perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and attitude toward use. In conclusion, culture affects people and businesses in different countries and cultures every day. It affects the way people think, feel, react and behave. Obviously, cultural factors affect how and reasons why consumer adopt social media as a communication channel.

2. Study implications

Social media has created a path for the evolution of a new culture, which is no longer shaped only by individual values and ideologies, but also by new communication tools in the social space. Utilizing a study that comprises cultural dimensions as a factor and determining the new technology acceptance will add relevant new details and theory to this emerging area of consumer behaviour research.

Goodrich and Mooij (2014) carried out research in which they examined the influence of culture on the role of social media in the consumer decision-making process. The dependent variables in this study are results from a survey conducted by Nielsen in 2010 on the influence of social media on purchase decisions and trust in recommendations from various online and offline influences. Nielsen polled over 27,000 Internet users in 55 countries from all parts of the world – Asia, Europe, Middle East, North America, and South America. The cultural variables of PDI (power distance), IDV (individualism), UAI (uncertainty avoidance), and long-term orientation were used to evaluate cultural differences by country. Important findings were made as there is a strong explaining function of IDV/COL for the usage of social media across cultures. Marketers should consider using social media more in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic. In addition, preferences for human sources of information are more important in cultures of short-term orientation and low UAI, whereas

fact-based information sources such as search engines are more important in cultures of long-term orientation and high UAI. The results also indicate that in collectivistic and high PDI cultures, people are more actively engaged in negative WOM with in-group members online than are those in individualistic and low PDI cultures. This means that negative experience or comments are very important to control in collectivistic and high PDI cultures. Goodrich and Mooij (2014) research let us understand and further develop the impact of Hofstede's cultural dimension on consumer purchase intention.

Akour, Alshare, Miller and Dwairi (2008) in their research about cultures, perceived usefulness and Internet acceptance states that computer technology, including Internet solutions, is culture specific. It works best in low power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, high individualism, and high masculinity cultures. The research suggested that perceived usefulness for Internet and ease of use for computer technology have a strong connection and is affected by cultural dimensions.

Considering the literature examined, the following hypotheses were developed:
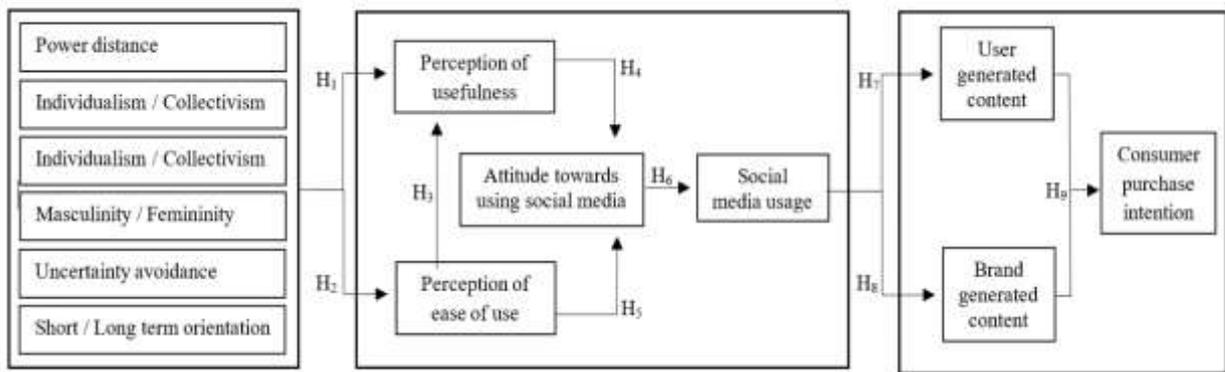
Source: created by the authors

Fig. 1. Conceptual research model.

H₁: Cultural dimensions will have a significant impact on perception of social media usefulness.
H₂: Cultural dimensions will have a significant impact on perception of ease of use of social media.

Authors investigating the technology acceptance model agree that perceived ease of use has an impact towards perceived usefulness (Amoako-Gyampah, 2005; Rauniar, Rawski, Yang and Johnson, 2014; King and He, 2006). Ramayah and Lo (2007) also statistically prove this connection. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H₃: Perception of usefulness will be influenced positively by perception of ease of use.

It is commonly believed that individuals would use application (social media) if they think that it would help them to achieve a specific result (Ayeh, Au, Law, 2013). As long as it would be easy and efficient to use. Another research highlights the positive connection between attitude, perceived usefulness and ease of use. Though regarded research was carried out considering social networking and travelling application, there are reasons to believe the same effect applies to social media. Thus, the following hypotheses are suggested:

H₄: Attitude towards using social media will be positively influenced by perception of usefulness.
H₅: Attitude towards using social media will be positively influenced by perception of ease of use.

Social networks utilizing social shopping applications have enormous potential to transform the retail landscape. A survey conducted by American Marketing Association indicated 47% of the consumers would visit social networking sites to search for and discuss holiday gift ideas, and 29% said they would buy products there (Horovitz, 2006). In today's global world it would be safe to assume that social networks are an important technology innovation that directly impact consumers and eventually will impact their perception with regards to purchasing intention online.

Authors Kim and Lee (2017) carried out research, which implies that product information in social media coming from unpaid sources leads to higher credibility and positive attitude towards a brand. Moreover, information generated by users in social media platforms is a considerable benefit for other users. Bahtar and Muda (2016) have suggested that online consumers perceive and believe that

contents generated by other users is more credible than the content provided by the sellers. In addition, information generated by users in social media platforms is a considerable benefit for the others as users engaged in social media view each other as a highly credible source of information.

Social media are exerting an increasingly profound influence over communication culture and economy, with various industries transforming the way they do business, as the number of worldwide social media users is expected to reach a third of the world's population by 2021 (Statista, 2017). Increasing number of social media users is accompanied by a growth in global digital ad spending. As reported by Statista (2015), social media accounted for 34.5% of digital advertising spending worldwide in 2017, compared with 23.2% in 2013. Consequently, the following hypotheses ae proposed:

H_6: Social media usage will be influenced positively by attitude towards using social media.

H_7: Social media usage will have positive impact on user generated content.

H_8: Social media usage will have positive impact on brand generated content.

H_9: Consumer purchase intentions will be positively influenced by exposure to brand and user generated content on social media.

Conclusions

1. Social media is an online social interaction phenomenon. As the usage of social media is rising, its communication functions encompass the sharing of user-generated content between users while also acting as a mass media platform and a strong vessel for electronic word-of-mouth.
2. Social media is considered one of the most influential platforms in terms of consumer behaviour, especially purchase intentions. It creates a venue to spread user-generated content in the form of electronic word-of-mouth and carry out brand's marketing actions, which can considerably impact consumer purchase intention.
3. According to scientific literature, cultural aspects deeply affect consumer and businesses. It plays a significant role in shaping an individual's behaviour and values, beliefs as well as preferences. Since users of social media come from different cultural backgrounds, the adoption of social media as a communication channel might differ and either manifest in consumer communities in social media.
4. Based on the analysis of the scientific literature, conceptual research framework, which relies on Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Technology Acceptance Model and the link between social media usage and consumer purchase intention have been created. Further research should focus on deeper analysis of attitude towards using social media and how social media usage influence user/brand generated content in order to influence consumer purchase intention.

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