

Young Consumers' Media Preferences and Cultural Motives Behind: A Cross-Country Analysis¹

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Abstract

Research on digital media has shown that in the last years there was a shift in media consumers' preferences from mass and segmented media towards the so-called lifestyle media consumption model. Nevertheless, while research on social media (SM) has determined several groups of SM's use motives, there is rather limited evidence on their use for cultural purposes. Moreover, most of the studies are country based thus, leaving aside issues like the homogenization of tastes and cultural differences or gender and generational gaps. This research aims to fill this gap. The dataset, collected in period 2015-16, consists of information from individuals of 15 years of age and older, from nine countries (Poland, Spain, Germany, China, India, Russia, Malta, USA, Turkey). The data are analysed with quantitative methods and findings confirm the popularity of social media like Facebook, and YouTube as the most frequently used by young people. With respect to cultural motives, country differences apply, with Chinese women, on average, most likely to use SM for cultural motives. European and US SM users seem to use SM for cultural purposes only rarely. Overall, findings show that cultural differences among countries must be taken into account in designing marketing and advertising strategies for SM.

Keywords: social networking sites; cultural motives; cross-country analysis; cultural identities

1. Introduction

Research evidence on SM use (i.e., consumer decision theory) has shown that they may have a significant impact on individuals' behavior (Ruane and Wallace 2013). As a matter of fact, the importance of SM usage stems from the motives behind using them and the frequency of doing so. The objective of this research is to identify patterns of SM users' behaviour, with a special focus on the cultural purposes. Lifestyle correlates

¹ Preliminary findings, please do not quote.

such as socioeconomic indicators, as well as cultural differences are expected to play a role as well: Furner and George (2012) have shown for example that cultural differences influence the way and the motive for using SM (see also Chau et al., 2002 for evidence on the differences between Americans and the Hong Kong citizens with respect to Internet uses. In a similar fashion, Ko et al. (2006), found that American users were putting more weight on comfort and the use of the internet for information searching while the Korean Internet users valued more the possibility of social interactions in the digital environment.

Overall, the research stream on the motives for using SM has determined several motivations such as the use of technologies, entertainment, information seeking, building self-image, utility, networking, etc. Nevertheless, there is rather limited evidence on their use for cultural consumption purposes. Moreover, most of the studies are country based thus, leaving aside issues like the gender gap, the generational differences and the role of cultural differences on the use of SM for cultural purposes. This research aims to fill this gap with a special focus on the use of SM by young people.

The dataset, collected in period 2015-16, consists of information from about 1,795 individuals of 15 years of age and older, from nine countries (Poland, Spain, Germany, China, India, Russia, Malta, USA and Turkey). The questionnaire elicited information about the frequency and motives behind the use of a large variety of social networking sites (SNSs), among others, with a special attention to cultural purposes (i.e., to watch video films made by others; featured films; video songs; to place user's own films; to subscribe to favorite user's films, etc.). The data are analysed with multivariate quantitative methods of analysis and findings confirmed the popularity of SM like Facebook and YouTube as the most frequently used websites and the existence of cultural differences in the use of SM for cultural purposes. Overall, the demographic covariates point to a gender bias in favour of women in the case of Asian SM, in particular.

The remaining of the article unfolds as follows: section two is dedicated to a brief review of the literature on SM, consumer behaviour and cultural consumption; section 3 is about the data and the methodology; in section 4 we discuss the results and in section 5 some conclusions are provided.

2. Brief literature review: SM and cultural consumption

Research on digital media has shown that in the last years there was a shift in media consumers' preferences from mass and segmented media towards the so-called lifestyle media consumption model. Some authors even proposed a new definition of the creative industries taking into account the social networks context (Potts, Cunningham, Hartley and Ormerod, 2008). As argued by these authors, creative industries can take good advantage of the digital environment given that consumers' behavior within such context is determined not only by the 'conventional consumer demand theory' but also by others' choice. From this perspective, *"a social network is defined as a connected group of individual agents who make production and consumption decisions based on the actions (signals) of other agents on the social network"* (Potts et al., 2008:172). The emergence of the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has motivated substantial research on the impact of the Internet on the homogenization of preferences and behavior of consumers from culturally different markets (see i.e., Levitt, 1983; Craig and Douglas, 2006; Munusamy et. al., 2009; Jiang and Wei, 2012, etc.). Nevertheless, as discussed by Hermeking (2006), the total convergence of markets from culturally different environments did not take place as many business strategic decisions still have to take into account local markets' characteristics (see i.e. Hermeking 2006 for a discussion on the distinction between "culture-free" and "culture-bound" products emerging from the research on marketing and advertising). To this, Hofstede's (1991) cultural framework of analysis, differentiating among two dimensions -individualistic and risk avoidance behavior-, has also contributed to explain the heterogeneity observed in the internet usage rates across countries (see also de Mooij, 2004; Yenyurt and Townsend, 2003, etc.). As a matter of fact, this variation was observed also when looking at the motives for using internet of users from different countries.

Nevertheless, although most of the findings on SM use are in line with the framework supplied by the theory distinguishing between individualistic (i.e. US) and collectivistic countries (i.e. Asian countries) the research evidence does not provide clear-cut results. In this line, concerning the use of SM for cultural purposes, Putzke et al. (2014) have shown that users of musical SM from highly individualistic cultures (Australia and the United States) were more likely to listen to and share music through SM than SM users from less individualistic cultures like, i.e., Finland and Germany. Other authors argue in favour of using the potential of the SM as 'experience spaces'

contributing thus to enhance the audiences of cultural events as the interaction with the SM could help them in building a meaning from their online experience (Russo and Watkins (2007). All in all, there is rather scarce evidence on the relationship between cultural differences and SM uses for cultural motives inviting for further research.

3. Methodology and data

3.1. Data and variables

Field work for data collection was conducted in period 2015-2016 and the final data set includes information on 1,795 respondents of 15 years of age and older, of nine different nationalities -295 Chinese, 63 Indians, 116 Germans, 51 Maltese, 296 Polish, 100 Russians, 130 Spaniards, 395 from Turkey and 257 from USA-, collected with a non-probabilistic purposive sampling method. Thus, the dataset allows distinguishing between culturally different countries (the main selection criterion), and also between emerging and established market economies (Craig & Douglas 2001). Apart from a battery of questions on the use of SM, the questionnaire included: a) several *socioeconomic* indicators (see Table 1 for basic statistics on the respondents' profile); b) the *behaviour of SM users* was registered by two variables: 1) the *frequency of using SM and social networking portals* by the respondents during the day and the night, with three levels –up to several hours per day, users who stay connected to SM all the time, and users who do not use SM every day (see Table 2); 2) the *frequency of using specific SM like i.e., Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.*, with three levels –often, rarely, never (see Table 2 where we report only the data for the frequency of using them *often*); c) the technological devices used to access SM was registered for three types of devices like i.e., PC/laptop, Phone/smartphone, and tablet/Ipad. Each variable registered the frequency of use of the specified device on a Likert type scale with 5 levels (very often to never); in order to control for the sparseness of the data, the frequency was recalculated for two levels –often (yes/no) and never (yes/no).

Table 1. Basic statistics (%)

		China	Germany	Poland	Spain	USA	Turkey	India	Malta	Russia
Gender										
	Women	68.6	50.0	71.9	50.8	57.0	49.6	22.2	37.3	67.0
	Men	31.4	50.0	28.1	49.2	43.0	50.4	77.8	62.7	33.0
Age										
	15 – 20 years	14.3	14.7	35.4	44.5	80.2	9.7	11.1	19.6	49.0
	21 – 30 years	66.7	82.7	63.9	55.5	16.3	76.8	79.4	49.0	48.0
	>= 31 years	19.0	2.6	0.7	n.d.	3.5	13.5	9.5	31.4	3.0
Education										

	Pupil	17.4	3.5	4.4	0.8	33.6	n.d.	6.3	4.0	1.0
	Bachelor	27.6	50.4	78.8	95.3	59.0	77.6	22.2	28.0	72.7
	Master	42.0	42.6	16.5	3.1	5.1	7.6	49.2	8.0	13.1
	Postgr/Prof. active	11.9	3.5	0.3	n.d.	2.3	14.2	20.6	54.0	11.1
		1.0	n.d.	n.d.	0.8	n.d.	0.5	1.6	6.0	2.0
Nationality										
		17.3	6.5	17.4	7.6	14.3	22.0	3.7	2.8	5.6
Civil status										
	Single-no kids	74.8	59.1	53.8	69.2	84.1	86.0	84.1	60.8	73.5
	Single-kids	0.7	n.d.	0.7	1.5	3.2	1.8	3.2	9.8	n.d.
	Partner-no kids	6.6	39.1	42.8	28.5	7.9	5.9	7.9	15.7	23.5
	Partner-kids	17.8	1.7	2.7	0.8	4.8	6.4	4.8	13.7	3.1

Source: own research; n.d. – no data

Table 2. Frequency of using SM (%)

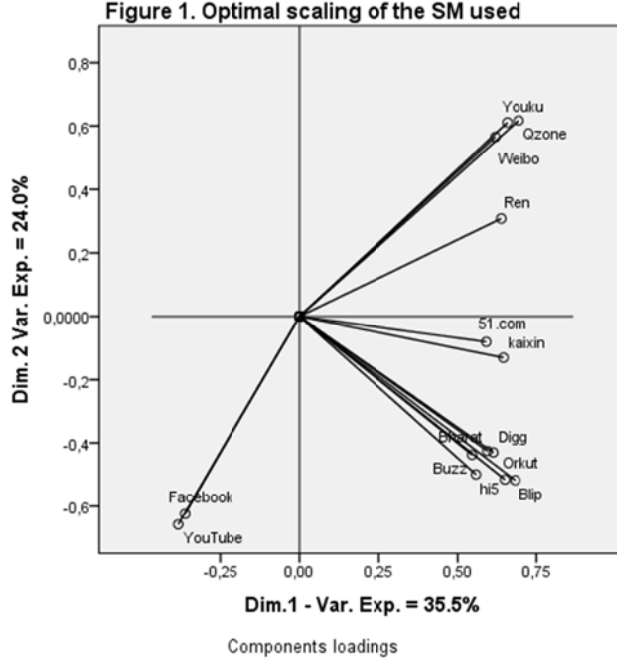
		China	Germany	Poland	Spain	USA	Turkey	India	Malta	Russia
Frequency of using SM										
	Connected all the time	35.6	26.7	22.0	22.3	23.0	22.5	34.9	17.6	45.0
	Up to several hours/day	14.9	20.7	28.0	20.8	18.7	15.7	28.6	7.8	23.0
	Not every day	15.6	14.7	11.1	6.9	5.4	9.4	17.5	3.9	2.0
Frequency of using SM „often” (selected SM):										
1	Twitter	1.8	4.3	3.1	17.6	54.7	52.7	20.0	4.0	14.4
2	Blip	n.d.	n.d.	0.3	n.d.	n.d.	0.6	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
3	Weibo	45.8	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	0.3	n.d.	2.0	n.d.
4	YouTube	9.1	60.7	70.8	53.9	55.4	74.2	83.9	58.8	49.5
5	Youku	28.0	0.9	1.5		0.4	2.7	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
6	Wiki	13.9	27.7	22.5	12.6	16.1	28.8	76.7	38.0	41.8
7	Digg	n.d.	n.d.	0.7	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
8	Buzz	n.d.	0.9	0.4	n.d.	0.4	n.d.	2.0	n.d.	n.d.
9	Golden line	n.d.	0.9	0.7	0.8	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
10	Linkedin	1.8	1.7	1.8	1.6	1.2	14.7	45.8	13.7	2.1
11	Facebook	9.2	80.0	91.2	89.7	85.3	72.1	91.7	88.2	26.3
12	MySpace	0.7	n.d.	0.7	n.d.	n.d.	2.3	n.d.	n.d.	1.0
13	Ren	9.9	n.d.	0.7	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
14	Kaixin	1.4	n.d.	0.3	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
15	51.com	2.2	n.d.	0.3	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
16	Qzone	48.8	n.d.	0.3	n.d.	n.d.	0.3	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
17	Bharat	n.d.	n.d.	0.4	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	4.2	n.d.	n.d.
18	Orkut	n.d.	n.d.	0.3	n.d.	n.d.	0.3	2.0	n.d.	n.d.
19	hi5	n.d.	n.d.	1.0	n.d.	n.d.		2.0	n.d.	n.d.
20	Groupon	n.d.	0.9	2.8	1.6	0.4	5.4	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.

Source: own research; n.d. – no data

d) *SM and cultural consumption*. This indicator was registered with a battery of questions that measured the frequency –often, rarely, never– of consuming various cultural activities through Youtube and Youku, in particular, or through SM in general: watching video films made by others; watching song’s videos; watch feature films; place users’ own films/photographs; or subscribe for the favourite users’ films; e) The questionnaire registered also the use of SM for *searching information* on specific cultural products, with three levels of frequency (often, rarely, never): radio and TV; events/cultural offers (cinema tickets, theatre, concerts, galleries, etc.), films/serials; antiquities (books); restaurants; and fashion.

3.2. *Optimal scaling of the SM used*

A set of 22 items (see Table 2) were dedicated to record a variety of SM used in the countries analysed, according to their frequency of use. The answers of the respondents, initially codified on a 9-point Likert scale (from 1-several times a day to 9-never use this medium/not familiar with it) were rescaled into three levels of frequency use (often, rarely, never/almost never) to reduce the sparseness of the data. In order to determine the adequate number of components to retain in the analysis we applied an optimal scaling method performed with the CATPCA algorithm (SPSS, 2010). One of the advantages of this type of analysis is that it allows for the Likert-type variables to be defined as ordinal instead of numerical and in addition, the lack of assumption usually associated with the traditional principal components analysis (e.g., linear relationship among numerical variables, multivariate normal data) eliminates the concern associated to skewed distributions (see also Linting et al. 2007). CATPCA implies a dynamic decision-making process based on an iterative analysis which makes possible the identification of the underlying components of the optimally scaled variables, maximizing the variance explained (VE) by these variables. An a priori inspection of the items composing the SM used would suggest four components, intuitively based on the eigenvalues (>1) of the correlation matrix of the quantified variables from a four-dimensional solution (Linting et al. 2007). Thus, the initial four-dimensional model including all 22 items accounted for 60.35% of the total VE. As five items did not appear to have a substantial contribution to the four principal components (the mean below or around 0.100) were dropped from the analysis. The final model, with fewer items, has proved to be better as the internal consistency has increased from 0.969 to 0.983 and the total VE has increased up to 79.1%. The optimal scaling of the items retained on each principal component is indicated in Figure 1, in a two dimensional space, where cluster 1 (*popular SM*) coalesces together SM like Facebook and Youtube, cluster 2 (*prof. Asian SM*) consists of two SM – 51.com and Kaixin, cluster 3 consists of four SM (Youku, Ozone, Weibo and Ren), (*Asian SM*), and cluster 4 coalesces together the remaining SM not accounted in the other clusters (Blin, Digg, Buzz, Orkut, etc., see Table 2), that is, *other SM*. Based on the outcome of the CATPCA algorithm we constructed the composite items for each of the clusters identified, and in order to reduce the sparseness of the data, for each cluster the three levels of the frequency of use (often, rarely, never) were collapsed into two levels –yes, often; and no, never.



3.3. Identifying patterns of SM users' behaviour

Furthermore, the four principal components identified with the optimal scaling method were used to segment the population of SM users in our database. In order to identify patterns of SM users' behaviour based on the nature of the SM most frequently used we employ the latent class (LC) analysis (Lazarsfeld and Henry 1968). Thus, in the model given in the equation below, the four segmenting indicators are denoted with Y_i ($i=1, \dots, 4$) and Y stands for the entire set of indicators, the other parameters stand for the cluster size $P(t)$, and $P(Y_i=y_i/t)$ represents indicators' probabilities conditioned to cluster membership for each cluster t . In the LC models each observation can be assigned to only one cluster (Magidson and Vermunt, 2001).

$$P(Y=y) = \sum_{t=1}^T P(t) \prod_{i=1}^4 P(Y_i = y_i | t)$$

The LC analysis estimates the model which is the adequate fit for the data, starting with the *null* model ($T=1$), with one latent class. The analysis was performed with LatentGold 4.5 (Vermunt and Magidson, 2008). The statistics used to select the number of latent clusters are reported in Table 3 and according to the measures of goodness of fit used (the lower their values, the better), the model with three latent classes is the best one, as it is the one providing the most information with the lowest number of

parameters (p-value >0.05 indicates also that the model with 3 clusters would be a good fit for the data).

Table 3. Goodness of fit statistics for the LC model

	LL	BIC(LL)	AIC(LL)	Npar	L ²	df	p-value	Class Error
1-Cluster	-1286.6935	2602.5969	2581.387	4	439.6223	11	2.30E-87	0.0000
2-Clusters	-1085.8034	2237.3292	2189.607	9	37.8421	6	1.20E-06	0.0036
3-Clusters	-1068.2409	2238.7167	2164.482	14	2.7171	1	0.12	0.0086
4-Clusters	-1067.7451	2274.2377	2173.49	19	1.7256	-4	.	0.3780

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. The parameters of the LC model

In Table 4 are shown the estimates of the parameters for the three-cluster model. The first row indicates the proportion, $P(t)$, of individuals classified in each cluster and the following row indicates the probability of using SM given individuals' classification on the t cluster, that is, $P(Y_i=y_i/t)$. The results (%) are presented as row profiles and indicate whether individuals classified in cluster t are over (see bold numbers) or underrepresented among individuals with that profile of SM use. In this fashion, the LC analysis suggests one large cluster, (89.82% of the sample) of individuals using very popular SM like Facebook and Youtube, a second cluster (9.8%) of individuals who use the *popular SM in the Asian environment* and the professional SM; and, a third cluster (0.41%) of SM users who use both Asian SM and *other SM*, specific to given cultural environments.

Table 4. Patterns of SM users' behaviour (row profiles, %)

	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
Size	89.82%	9.77%	0.41%
Indicators			
<i>Popular Asian SM (Youku, Qzone, Weibo, RenRen)</i>			
no	99.42%	0.56%	0.02%
yes often	2.83%	93.18%	3.99%
<i>Prof. SM (51.com and kaixin001)</i>			
no	90.58%	9.4%	0.02%
yes often	5.77%	49.92%	44.31%
<i>Popular SM (Facebook and Youtube)</i>			
no	52.36%	47.62%	0.01%
yes often	98.04%	1.46%	0.5%
<i>Other SM</i>			
no	90.07%	9.8%	0.13%
yes often	18.45%	0.0%	81.55%

4.2. Patterns of SM use for cultural purposes and socioeconomic covariates

In Tables 5 and 6 below are presented the motives behind using SM for cultural/leisure purposes and their lifestyle correlates. The results show that, on average the most popular SM (Facebook and Youtube) are used mainly by young men (15-20 years of age), with a bachelor degree, of all nationalities, except for the Chinese SM users, and they only rarely look for cultural information through these SM. The individuals in cluster 2 (users of popular Asian SM and professional SM) are, as expected, integrated only by Chinese users, women, above 21 years of age and with a master degree. They use the SM very often for all cultural purposes analysed here; cluster 3, a small proportion of the sample, is integrated by Indian nationals, on average men of 21-30 years of age, holding a master degree or being professionally active. They have clear preferences with respect to cultural motives as they use SM very often to search for information about films/serials or restaurants (leisure) and only rarely for information on events/cultural offers or for watching films placed by others.

Table 5. Patterns of SM use for cultural/leisure purposes
(row profiles, %)

	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
Size	89.82%	9.77%	0.41%
Indicators			
<i>Watch films placed by others</i>			
No rarely	91.19%	8.34%	0.47%
Yes often	86.99%	12.63%	0.38%
<i>Searching information on cultural events</i>			
No rarely	90.91%	8.53%	0.55%
Yes often	88.01%	11.67%	0.32%
<i>Searching information about films/serials</i>			
No rarely	93.76%	5.82%	0.42%
Yes often	85.39%	14.15%	0.46%
<i>Searching information about restaurants</i>			
No rarely	93.09%	6.48%	0.42%
Yes often	83.8%	15.72%	0.48%

Table 6. Socioeconomic profile of the SM users

	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
Size	89.82%	9.77%	0.41%
Indicators			
<i>Gender</i>			
women	87.48%	12.2%	0.32%
men	92.23%	7.24%	0.54%
<i>Personal Status</i>			
Single no kids	88.49%	11.06%	0.46%
Single with kids	99.34%	0.66%	0.0%
Partner no kids	96.37%	3.23%	0.4%

Partner with kids	83.48%	16.47%	0.05%
<i>Nationality</i>			
Polish	99.42%	0.28%	0.3%
Spanish	99.69%	0.3%	0.0%
Indian	92.48%	0.17%	7.35%
Chinese	44.29%	55.33%	0.38%
Turkish	99.45%	0.55%	0.0%
Maltese	99.47%	0.53%	0.0%
Russian	98.83%	1.17%	0.0%
German	99.76%	0.24%	0.0%
USA	99.81%	0.19%	0.0%
<i>Age</i>			
15-20 years	94.77%	4.99%	0.24%
21-30 years	86.86%	12.58%	0.56%
>=31 years	88.03%	11.97%	0.0%
<i>Education</i>			
Schoolboy	79.76%	19.0	1.23%
Bachelor	95.89%	3.98%	0.13%
Master degree	74.12%	25.19%	0.68%
Postgr/Prof. active	90.67%	8.45%	0.88%
Prof. inactive	98.17%	1.83%	0.0%

5. Conclusions

Overall, the analysis of the SM users' patterns of behaviour has returned evidence in favour of cultural differences: while most popular SM like Facebook and Youtube are used by most users in all the European countries in the data set and the US, some country specific SM (like in the case of China and India) are preferred mainly by those countries' nationals, most likely due to cultural/language barriers. Socioeconomic covariates give support to the evidence in favour of a gender gap with respect to the Sm use for cultural motives, with women, on average, more likely to be engaged in consuming cultural products (films, serial, etc.) and searching for cultural information through SM, than men. The generational gap, has shown that most frequently used SM (Facebook, Youtube) are very popular among young people, in particular. All in all, the evidence presented here is in line with the research findings on digital marketing and advertising, advocating in favour of taking into account cultural differences among countries when designing marketing strategies for SM.

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