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Title	Addressing user engagement in social media platforms with cultural differences based on Hofstede's dimensions
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Publication date	2024-03-01
Original Citation	Han, Y., Nguyen, H. D. and Kim, T. H. (2024) 'Addressing user engagement in social media platforms with cultural differences based on Hofstede's dimensions', Asia Pacific Journal of Information Systems, 34(1), pp. 191-208. https://doi.org/10.14329/apjis.2024.34.1.191
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.14329/apjis.2024.34.1.191
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Download date	2026-11-06 20:44:50
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/16130

UCC
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Asia Pacific Journal of Information Systems
Vol. 34 No. 1 (March 2024), 191-208

ISSN 2288-5404 (Print) / ISSN 2288-6818 (Online)
https://doi.org/10.14329/apjis.2024.34.1.191

Addressing User Engagement in Social Media Platforms with Cultural Differences Based on Hofstede's Dimensions

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes the presence and importance of cultural differences to address user engagement in worldwide social media platforms. Based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions, this paper addresses their new meanings in the context of user engagement in social media. Our propositions address two research questions: (1) how do cultural dimensions, displayed on social media platforms, differ across national cultures?; (2) what different preferences the social media platforms have in terms of which cultural dimensions promote or suppress user engagement? User engagement in social media platforms is explained by the cultural differences in terms of the four cultural dimensions: individualism vs. collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and masculinity vs. femininity. Implications are also discussed for research and practice.

Keywords: Cultural Differences, Hofstede's Dimensions, User Engagement, Social Media Platform, Social Networking

Ⅰ. Introduction

In the previous two decades, the world has witnessed a rapid rise in the number of online communities where people meet to socialize, exchange information, and participate in leisure activities virtually. Such websites can be broadly categorized as social media platforms (Rains and Brunner, 2015) and are available ubiquitously for users today thanks to not only web access but also mobile access to the Internet.

This spurt in the popularity of social media platforms has attracted the attention of social network researchers who have consequently studied several aspects of this emergence including but not limited to its adoption motivations (Ernst et al., 2015; Herrero

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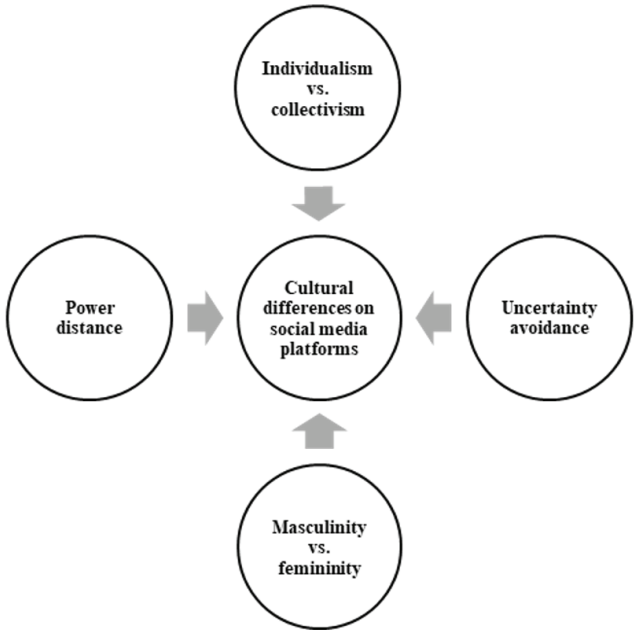
et al., 2018; Krishnan and Hunt, 2015), user gratifications (Han et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2014; Pai and Arnott, 2013), and the concept of social capital as applied to online user communities (Al-Ghaith, 2015; Cheng et al., 2019; Choi and Chung, 2013). While there has been anecdotal evidence of the prevalence of cultural issues in social media platforms (Cho and Park, 2013; Jackson and Wang, 2013), there has been very little research, empirical or otherwise, probing the cultural aspects of social network users worldwide.

This research proposes the presence and importance of cultural dimensions on social media available all over the world. Hofstede (1983a) in his seminal works on the concept of national cultures illustrated several dimensions of culture that he observed in his empirical study spanning over 50 countries of the world. Among these, the more notable dimensions that he mentioned include (1) individualism vs. collectivism, (2) uncertainty avoidance, (3) power distance, and (4) masculinity vs. femininity. Specifically, the *individualism-collectivism* dimension is explained as the social perceptions of people, i.e., individualistic or collectivistic; the *uncertainty avoidance* defines the extent to which people within a culture are made nervous by situations that they consider to be unstructured, unclear, or unpredictable, and the extent to which they try to avoid such situation by adopting strict codes of behavior and a belief in absolute truths; *power distance* indicates the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations accept and expect that power is distributed unequally; the *masculinity-femininity* dimension describes the extent to which gender roles are distinct or overlap in a given society. With the advent of a parallel universe of discourse called online social networks, we propose new meanings of Hofstede's cultural dimensions to user engagement in worldwide social media platforms.

Users of social media platforms experience a strong sense of cultural similarity to what is prevalent in their society at the time of their joining the user communities. The cultural similarity may promote social network adoption and retention for societies that are progressive and have a population that is mostly satisfied with the efforts of their government (low power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, etc.). The reverse may be also true for societies that are severely restricted in terms of freedom of speech and expression and are strongly bi-polarized in their socio-political outlook (high power distance). In such societies, social media adoption may be high for websites that offer people a way to express themselves better and experience a more open culture than what is prevalent in their society.

In short, national and virtual cultures might be similar or different, and understanding this interplay is important to the context of user engagement in user communities of social media. In this sense, this paper addresses *how cultural dimensions displayed on social media platforms differ from the national culture within a given country*. Some online social networks promote certain types of cultural values over others. For instance, while most websites encourage the use of the term "friend" to indicate a relationship or tie on the social networks enabled by social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.), the other websites also allow additional types of ties like "followers" or "subscribers" which enforce a stronger power distance index on its users. This leads us to our second research question, i.e., *what different preferences the social media platforms have in terms of which cultural dimensions promote or suppress user engagement?*

This paper utilizes Hofstede's cultural dimensional model to elucidate the cultural characteristics of a



<Figure 1> Four Dimensions of Cultural Differences on Social Network Sites

social network site with its four cultural dimensions (individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, masculinity vs. femininity, and uncertainty avoidance), as shown in <Figure 1>. Such a culture-oriented approach is required because most users adopt and use social media to interact with other users across countries with cultural differences.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 summarizes the related literature in the field of national cultures and social network sites while Section 3 proposes the cultural dimensions as differential drivers encouraging user engagement in user communities of social media platforms. Finally, we discuss implications for research and practice from our propositions in terms of user engagement with cultural differences.

Ⅱ. Literature Review

First, we review the related concepts and various aspects of culture literature which firm up a theoretical base for subsequent discussion. Second, literature on social media platforms is reviewed which contributes to the development of our propositions to explain user engagement in social media with cultural differences. We also provide an overview of previous research on cross-cultural analysis on social media platforms.

2.1. National Culture with Cultural Dimensions

Culture has been described as an elusive concept that is a fuzzy, difficult-to-define construct (Triandis et al., 1986). However, many researchers have offered different definitions of culture. Kroeber (1952) recorded over 160 definitions of culture. For example, Namenwirth and Weber (1987) defined a system of ideas that provide a design for living, while Clark

<Table 1> Taxonomy of Culture

Category	Definition
Relation to self	Reflects concerns with self-concept and personality ▪ Individualism/collectivism (Hofstede, 1980) ▪ Masculinity/femininity (Hofstede, 1980) ▪ Conceptions of self (Inkeles and Levinson, 1969) ▪ Tightness/looseness (Peabody, 1985) ▪ Extroversion (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1969) ▪ Perception of human nature (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961)
Relation to others	Reflects the emphasis given to hierarchical relations in family, social class, and reference groups ▪ Power distance (Hofstede, 1980) ▪ Relation to authority (Inkeles and Levinson, 1969) ▪ Assertiveness (Peabody, 1985) ▪ Psychoticism (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1969) ▪ Orientation toward human relationships (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961)
Relation to risk	Reflects research into the perception, evaluation, and experience of risk in the buying/consumption process ▪ Uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1980) ▪ Primary dilemmas or conflicts (Inkeles and Levinson, 1969)

(1990) described culture as a distinctive, enduring pattern of behavior and/or personality characteristics. Hofstede's definition (1984) is often the most accepted to date. He defined culture as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group from another.

Drawing on various definitions of culture, Clark (1990) developed conceptual cultural taxonomies, as illustrated in <Table 1>. He identified three emerging domains of study and classified them using the extant literature on culture as (1) relation to self, (2) relation to others, and (3) relation to risk.

In this paper, we mainly focus on the four cultural dimensions: i.e., individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity vs. femininity (Hofstede, 1983a, 1983b). These dimensions have been extensively invoked by researchers to help explain cross-cultural differences (Bond and Smith, 1993; Kagitcibasi and Berry, 1989). For each of the dimensions, specific characteristics are summarized from Doney et al.'s work (1998), as illustrated in <Table 2>.

2.2. Social Media Platforms for Social Networking

According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), social media platforms are used for social networking and are defined as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of such social connections may vary by each social media platform.

The social media platform is at times used interchangeably with the term "social networking site." However, a lot of sociology researchers (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Centola, 2013; Meng, 2016) believe

<Table 2> Characteristics of Four Dimensions

Dimension	Characteristics	
Individualism vs. collectivism	Individualism	Collectivism
	▪ "I" consciousness (self-orientation) ▪ Value individual accomplishment ▪ Tolerate individual behavior and opinion ▪ Low loyalty to other people and institutions ▪ Interact on an individual, competitive basis ▪ Loose interpersonal ties	▪ "We" consciousness (group orientation) ▪ Value joint efforts and group rewards ▪ Norms for behavioral conformity ▪ High loyalty to other people and institutions ▪ Interact in an interdependent, cooperative mode ▪ Strong interpersonal ties
Masculinity vs. femininity	Masculinity	Femininity
	▪ Value individual achievement ▪ Norm for confrontation ▪ Norms for independent thought and action	▪ Norms for solidarity and service ▪ Norm for cooperation ▪ Social norms honoring moral obligations
Power distance	High power distance	Low power distance
	▪ Norms for differential prestige, power, wealth ▪ Norm for conflict ▪ Authoritarian norm	▪ Egalitarian relationships prevail ▪ Norm for cooperation ▪ Norms for interdependence, solidarity, affiliation
Uncertainty avoidance	High uncertainty avoidance	Low uncertainty avoidance
	▪ Need for structure (formal rules and regulations) ▪ Human behavior is purposive ▪ Norm for compromise ▪ Strong faith in institutions ▪ Belief in experts and their knowledge	▪ High tolerance for deviance ▪ Human behavior is unpredictable ▪ Norm for conflict ▪ Weak faith in people and institutions

that the term "networking" implies a relationship initiation process. However, the primary objective of social media platforms is not to initiate relationships but to sustain existing ones. The online meetings are frequently between "latent ties" to those who generally share offline connections as well (Swart et al., 2019). Two concepts are ubiquitous across all social media platforms, as follows:

- Profiles: the profile information used in self-disclosure and contains personal demographics; information about interests, relationships, etc.; the visibility of the user profile varying with the choice of social media platforms (Oghazi et al., 2020; Xie and Kang, 2015)
- Activities: information browsing (e.g., news feed), information searching, social interaction, information sharing, etc. (Asghar, 2015; Junaidi et al., 2020)

Social media platforms may be general-purpose or usage-specific. For instance, Facebook and Orkut are general-purpose social media. Some social media allow for integrating blogs, while others allow video and audio sharing. YouTube is a video-based social network site. There are even social media platforms for dogs (Dogster) and for cats (Catster) although their owners must manage their profiles.

2.3. Cross-Cultural Research on Social Networking Sites

There has been significant research done on social media platforms in terms of friendship performance, networks, and connections (Niland et al., 2015; Zhang and Leung, 2015), privacy issues (Baruh et al., 2017; Chen and Chen, 2015; Zhou and Li, 2014), and impression management (Dorethy et al., 2014; Park and Kang, 2013; Ranzini and Hoek, 2017; Zhu and Bao, 2018). However, cultural differences on social media platforms are not fully explored as most of the studies are scattered and limited in terms of generalizability.

A pioneer in the study of culture in social media platforms, Chau (2008) suggested that individualism vs. collectivism is a particularly relevant dimension in studying the use of web 2.0 services such as social media platforms. Although he explained the distinctions between individualism and collectivism in social media, very little insight on how to operationalize his concepts on social media platforms was offered. Conversely, Chapman and Lahav (2008) did an empirical study to identify the differences in user goals and behaviors across four countries, i.e., the U.S., France, China, and South Korea. They found the effects of cultural differences on social media users' goals and behaviors. However, there were only 36 users in total in the study and hence a question mark remains about the generalizability of the results. In a larger-scale data study, Lewis and George (2008) put up an online questionnaire on two social media platforms (MySpace and Cyworld) to investigate the effects of national culture on deceptive behaviors observed in social media platforms. Based on 193 respondents, the study suggests key differences in deceptive behaviors between the two cultures, i.e., the U.S. and South Korea. South Koreans tend to lie about their appearances whereas Americans are more likely to lie about their ages and physical locations.

Ⅲ. User Engagement in Social Media Platforms with Cultural Differences

3.1. Individualism vs. Collectivism

Individualism and collectivism are characterized by the social perceptions of people (Hofstede, 1980, 1984, 2001). Hofstede classified over 50 countries based on whether their societies are a nationwide culture that is individualistic or collectivistic (Hofstede, 1983a). In predominantly individualistic cultures, people show a high degree of independence from their in-groups. They generally pursue and value their personal goals over those of their in-groups i.e. their society in this case. In contrast, people in collectivistic cultures show strong interdependence within their in-groups. The goals of their in-groups are valued at a higher level than their own desires and aspirations and the members generally behave according to the norms of their in-groups.

The widespread adoption of social media platforms in modern society has fundamentally changed the way people interact with each other and the world around them. Individualistic cultures tend to exhibit a higher level of self-expression and creativity, seeking to assert their unique identity through user-generated content that reflects their individual preferences, opinions, and perspectives. Visual media, such as photos and videos, are also particularly relevant in individualistic cultures that prioritize autonomy and independence, providing a powerful tool for users to showcase their creativity and uniqueness. Creating personal brand identities that reflect their individual preferences and perspectives is an important aspect of self-expression on social media platforms.

Social media platforms also provide effective features for individual users to voice their opinions

on a wide range of issues. Users in individualistic cultures may have a greater interest in creating and managing attractive personal profile pages and photos as a way to showcase their unique identity and personality. Furthermore, users in individualistic cultures may have a greater interest in sharing information about themselves than engaging with others, as they prioritize personal achievement and recognition. This can manifest in frequent changes in relationship status, career options, and locations, as users seek to showcase their personal achievements and individuality.

As such, the cultural values of individualism, autonomy, and self-expression may explain why certain features of social networking sites are more popular among users in individualistic cultures. With the unique opportunity for self-expression and creativity provided by social media, users in individualistic cultures can showcase their unique identities and personalities, using these platforms as a mode of self-expression to share their opinions, ideas, and experiences with others. Based on this, we propose:

Proposition 1a. Individualistic cultures prioritize individualism, autonomy, and self- expression, leading to a higher degree of self-expression and personalization on social media platforms, which is reflected in the usage patterns of certain features and activities in social media platforms.

The collectivistic view of social networks emphasizes the importance of group identity and interdependence, with a focus on social harmony and cooperation rather than individual expression. In this sense, users from collectivist cultures are more likely to engage in group participation and collective knowledge-sharing on social media platforms. One key feature of social media platforms that aligns with collectivistic values is the ability to create and join groups and communities. Collectivist cultures tend to place a greater emphasis on social connections and relationships, making these features particularly relevant for users who prioritize group identity and interdependence.

Another important aspect of collectivist cultures is the use of social media for promoting causes or communities. Users from collectivist cultures may be more likely to use social media to raise awareness and mobilize support for social issues or events, reflecting their prioritization of social harmony and collective action. Furthermore, collectivist cultures may exhibit a greater interest in engaging the online community to further discussion or deliberation on topics. These users may be more likely to participate in online forums and discussions, sharing ideas and perspectives with others and seeking consensus and agreement.

Finally, in contrast to individualistic cultures, collectivist cultures may show limited changes in relationship status, career options, and locations on social media. This reflects a focus on stability and continuity in social connections, rather than an individualistic focus on personal achievement and recognition.

To summarize, the collectivistic view of social networks suggests that users from collectivist cultures are more likely to engage in group participation, knowledge-sharing, and community-building on social media platforms. The ability to create and join groups, promote causes or communities, and engage in online discussions are key features that align with collectivist values. We propose as follows:

Proposition 1b. Collectivistic cultures prioritize group identity and interdependence, leading to a greater emphasis on group participation and collective knowledge-sharing on social media platforms, which

<Table 3> Individualism and Collectivism on Social Media Platforms

Individualism	Collectivism
▪ Greater interest in creating and managing attractive personal profile pages and photos ▪ Using social networks as a mode of self-expression ▪ Greater interest in sharing information about self than engaging others ▪ Shows frequent changes in relationship status, career options, and locations	▪ Greater interest in joining groups and communities online ▪ Using social networks to promote a cause or a community ▪ Greater interest in engaging the online community to further discussion or deliberation on topics ▪ Shows limited changes in relationship status, career options, and locations

is reflected in their usage patterns of certain features and activities in social media platforms.

The evidence for individualistic and collectivistic differences (Triandis, 2018), as expected to be seen on social media platforms, is summarized in <Table 3>. There has been existing work looking into the relationship between the individualistic and collectivistic indices and social capital in a social network (Beilmann et al., 2018; Na et al., 2015). Although extant literature has hinted at the cross-cultural differences in the online activity of users (Alsaleh et al., 2019; Lee and Gretzel, 2014; Merhi et al., 2019), there has not been any focused study that has looked into investigating whether social network site usage is governed by individualistic or collectivistic motivations.

3.2. Uncertainty Avoidance

According to Hofstede (1984), uncertainty avoidance, as a characteristic of a culture, defines the extent to which people within a culture are made nervous by situations that they consider to be unstructured, unclear, or unpredictable, and the extent to which they try to avoid such situation by adopting strict codes of behavior and a belief in absolute truths.

Many researchers have explained the term, uncertainty avoidance, along with its characteristics. Among many, a specific characteristic that most researchers have focused on in their interpretations is the need for structure and strong faith in an institution (Clark, 1990; Doney et al., 1998). In high levels of uncertainty avoidance, people are more likely to feel comfortable when they belong to a certain structure. Two aspects are identified to measure uncertainty avoidance: (1) company rules should not be broken; (2) people with high uncertainty avoidance tendencies tend to stay in the company longer (Hofstede, 1983a, 1983b). That is, people with high uncertainty avoidance tendencies feel comfortable when they are inside the structure.

Social media platforms have become an essential part of people's daily lives, as they provide a means for communication and knowledge sharing with both known and unknown individuals as part of virtual community activity. Without these social interactions facilitated by media, people may feel left behind and experience a feeling of having lost something important, such as information, friends, reputation, and others. Research suggests that not using social media platforms may result in feelings of isolation and a lack of communication with other people in their communities (Katz et al., 1974; Krugman and Rust, 1987; Levy and Pitsch, 1984; Lin and Jeffres, 1998).

The concept of uncertainty avoidance can be applied to user engagement in social media platforms. High uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to show

a greater inclination towards engagement in social media, as evidenced by their purposeful online activities, compromising behavior, platform loyalty, and belief in online influencers and public figures. This is because people in uncertain times tend to seek structure and security by fitting into society or a community, even in virtual life. Social media platforms provide a means for people to communicate and share knowledge with both known and unknown people as part of a virtual community activity, which helps alleviate the discomfort of feeling lost or disconnected.

In contrast, users in low uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to exhibit less engagement with social media platforms, as evidenced by their higher tolerance for deviant behavior, unpredictable user behavior, norms for conflict, weak social media friendships compared to real life, and lower platform loyalty. Users in low uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to have a more relaxed attitude towards social norms, which can lead to a higher tolerance for deviant behavior and a greater likelihood of conflict and unpredictable behavior. This, in turn, can result in weaker social media friendships compared to real life, and lower platform loyalty. Users in low uncertainty avoidance cultures may not feel a strong need to engage with social media platforms due to a greater sense of security and stability in their real-life social networks, which reduces their dependence on online interactions for social support and information.

Understanding the concept of uncertainty avoidance is crucial in explaining and predicting user behavior in virtual communities such as social media platforms. Recognizing the importance of social media in fulfilling people's need for social interaction and support is also essential. We propose as follows:

Proposition 2. In cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, users tend to show more engagement with social media platforms compared to low uncertainty avoidance cultures, as indicated by their increased propensity to form social connections with other users, engage in purposeful online activities, exhibit stronger platform loyalty, and place greater trust in online influencers and public figures.

The characteristics of uncertainty avoidance are summarized in <Table 4>.

3.3. Power Distance

Power distance has been illustrated in Hofstede's models of national culture (Hofstede, 1983a, 1983b, 1984). Power distance indicates the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. This implies that cultures involving a low power distance index foster a democratic environment where the

<Table 4> High Uncertainty Avoidance and Low Uncertainty Avoidance on Social Media Platforms

High Uncertainty Avoidance	Low Uncertainty Avoidance
▪ Need for engagement in social media platforms ▪ All online activities are purposive ▪ Norm for compromise in their activities (e.g., when leaving comments) ▪ Heavy users are faithful on certain social media platforms ▪ Belief in big names online (such as public figures that have lots of friends and leverage to others)	▪ High tolerance for deviance in social media activities ▪ User behavior is unpredictable ▪ Some users have a norm for conflict that arguing a lot on a social media platform ▪ Social media friendship is weakly tied compared to real life

members perceive each other as peers and frequently participate in cooperative and collaborative behavior with an informal flow of information. In contrast, a high power distance leads to the rise of autocratic and hierarchical structures where information flow is highly formal and often restricted.

The Hofstede cultural dimensions framework (Hofstede, 1983a, 1983b) proposes that some countries have higher power distance indices than others, leading to the expectation that users from different cultural backgrounds would develop an affinity for certain types of online social networks. This proposition suggests that users from cultures with high power distance are more likely to prefer social media platforms that highlight a distinction between prominent and ordinary users, characterized by differences in usage patterns and socialization behavior and a heightened awareness of gaps in popularity and perceived influence. In contrast, users from low power distance cultures tend to prefer social media platforms where popular or important members are not clearly identifiable, usage patterns are homogenous, all members socialize to the same extent, and members believe that they are equal with each other on all standings on the site.

For instance, social media platforms like Facebook enable individuals to become "friends" through mutual connections, fostering an environment that doesn't emphasize a power distance gap among users. This approach aligns with Facebook's core focus on personal connections and social interactions, designed to minimize power distance by encouraging informal and symmetrical relationships, allowing people to connect regardless of their social or professional standing. On the other hand, platforms like Twitter create a notable differentiation between "friends" and "followers", intensifying the power distance gap. Twitter's constraints on character count and the public nature of tweets frequently prompt users to follow individuals or entities with greater influence or authority, resulting in a more pronounced hierarchical arrangement. Further, social media platforms like LinkedIn have the option to obtain "premium" memberships or aim to attain the status of a "thought leader", which signifies an elevated power distance relative to regular users. LinkedIn, which is primarily oriented towards professional networking, places emphasis on professional achievements and connections. Users frequently establish connections with others for career-related opportunities, thereby contributing to the development of a network structure characterized by formality and hierarchy. Therefore, the differences in cultural dimensions have significant implications for the design and usage of social media platforms. We propose as follows:

Proposition 3. Users in cultures with high power distance are more likely to choose social media platforms that highlight a distinction between prominent and ordinary users, characterized by differences in usage patterns and socialization behavior, and a heightened awareness of gaps in popularity and perceived influence, compared to users in cultures with low power distance.

The differences between high power distance and low power distance have been summarized in <Table 5>.

3.4. Masculinity vs. Femininity

Hofstede's masculinity-femininity dimension (Hofstede, 1983a, 1983b) is a widely recognized concept that describes the extent to which gender roles are distinct or overlap in a given society. In a masculine society, men are typically expected to exhibit

<Table 5> High Power Distance and Low Power Distance on Social Media Platforms

High Power Distance	Low Power Distance
▪ Popular or important members are clearly identifiable ▪ Behavior or usage pattern of important members different from the rest ▪ Important members rarely socialize with other members ▪ All members are aware of this gap in popularity and/or perceived influence	▪ Popular or important members are not clearly identifiable ▪ Homogenous usage pattern ▪ All members socialize to the same extent as each other ▪ Members believe that they are equal with each other on all standings on the site

assertive, tough, and competitive behaviors, while emphasizing material success. On the other hand, women are expected to prioritize the quality of life and exhibit modest, tender behaviors. In contrast, in a feminine society, both men and women are encouraged to exhibit nurturing and modest behaviors, while prioritizing quality of life.

The differences in cultural values between masculine and feminine societies can be reflected in online social networking sites. In a masculine culture, social media is used as a platform to establish networks based on achievement and success, which aligns with the cultural emphasis on these values. People in masculine societies prioritize career success and advancement, and therefore, use social media primarily for fact gathering and networking based on career opportunities. This translates into creating professional profiles, sharing success stories or achievements, and seeking factual information from social connections as a means of achieving professional success. Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 4a. Individuals in masculine cultures exhibit a greater tendency to focus on professional success and advancement on social media platforms compared to those in feminine cultures, resulting in the creation of professional profiles, the sharing of success stories and achievements, fact gathering, and networking for career opportunities.

In contrast, in feminine cultures, the focus is on building and nurturing personal relationships, with less emphasis placed on professional accomplishments. This emphasis on personal connections leads to greater value being placed on shared interests and personal stories, rather than on career achievements. As a result, there is less pressure to create a highly polished and comprehensive online profile. Moreover, the use of real names and profile pictures may be less important than the content of the interaction, as the focus is on forming a genuine connection with the other person, rather than presenting oneself in a particular way. Additionally, in feminine cultures, the emphasis on nurturing personal relationships extends to the realm of online social networking. Genuine and supportive connections hold significant value, discouraging competitive behaviors like the aggressive accumulation of numerous social connections. Friend jealousy is negatively perceived within these cultural contexts due to its potential to disrupt harmony and trust within personal relationships. The rationale is that individuals in these cultures prioritize shared interests, personal narratives, and authentic connections, resulting in reduced competition for social connections and a lower likelihood of friend jealousy as compared to masculine cultures. We propose as follows:

Proposition 4b. Individuals in feminine cultures tend to prioritize building and nurturing personal relation-

<Table 6> Masculinity and Femininity on Social Media Platforms

Feminine	Masculine
▪ The network is used for rapport building ▪ Making friends based on intrinsic interest ▪ Completeness of profile is less concerned ▪ More life stories/gossip/jokes are posted ▪ The use of the real name and real profile pictures are less concerned ▪ Jealousy of those who try to be connected	▪ The network is used for fact gathering ▪ Making friends based on career opportunities ▪ Public profiles are professionally completed ▪ More achievements and success stories are posted ▪ The use of the real name and real profile pictures is more concerned ▪ Competition in the network, trying to befriend as many as possible

ships compared to those in masculine cultures, leading to a greater value placed on shared interests and personal stories rather than career accomplishments, and thus, a less polished and comprehensive online profile.

The differing cultural values between masculine and feminine societies are reflected in their online social networking behaviors. While people in masculine cultures prioritize professional success and use social media as a tool for advancing their career goals, those in feminine cultures prioritize building personal relationships and using social media to connect on a more personal level. The following differences between masculine and feminine societies on social media platforms are listed in <Table 6>.

Ⅳ. Implications

This paper addresses user engagement with cross-cultural different usages in online social networks. With the emergence and rapid spread of online social media, citizens across geographical boundaries have registered their presence in such worldwide social networks. Among such popular ones as Facebook, Bebo, Twitter, and LinkedIn have been the subject of several research studies, most of which probe into various aspects of user engagement (Ernst et al., 2015; Herrero et al., 2018; Krishnan and Hunt, 2015), general usage statistics (Ellison et al., 2007; Hargittai, 2007) and causal effects on other offline activities of the users (Swart et al., 2019). However, there is a clear lack of structured research into understanding cultural footprints in social media usage and how different social media platforms enforce or suppress user engagement with cultural differences.

This paper contributes to the study of national cultures by extending Hofstede's cultural dimensions beyond the physical networks and into the virtual networks. We acknowledge that the virtual life of users as illustrated by Boyd and Ellison (2007) is strikingly different from the physical world in that the users often attempt to present a self-idealized version of themselves on social network sites. Furthermore, online social network causes a blurring of geographical boundaries and helps people communicate across any socio-cultural barriers. All these factors contribute to the creation of a complicated cultural representation of human behaviors on social media platforms. In such an online context that emphasizes the blurring of national and institutional boundaries, the question that remains to be answered is the validity of Hofstede's dimensions of national culture. This paper asserts that Hofstede's cultural

dimensions should hold for all cultural manifestations irrespective of the context. However, proving this assertion is a non-trivial adventure and this study seeks to establish the proof in many well-thought-out steps.

First, we elucidate the meanings of the various constructs as mentioned by Hofstede i.e. individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance in the context of user engagement in social media platforms and cite theoretical background in literature wherever possible to substantiate similar efforts done by other authors in defining these constructs in our target context. Some of the cultural dimensions are enforced by the setting of the social media platforms themselves. For instance, Twitter enforces a higher power distance network than Facebook by virtue of its design. The other cultural dimensions are enforced or suppressed based on the user's volition. This paper contributes significantly to theory by proposing the roadmap for extensive prior studies surrounding our propositions to solidify our understanding of user engagement in social media platforms with cultural differences.

Second, our propositions would have implications for a number of stakeholders in the social media platforms. While we do not emphasize that the cultural implications are the only or even the strongest causal component influencing social media adoption, we nonetheless point to the importance of cultural dimensions in making a social networking site popular among users. If users on a social media platform feel comfortable experiencing a cultural setting that is in line with what's prevalent in their society, then it is hypothesized that the users would adopt and continue using the social network site. In some countries, however, where freedom of expression and speech is curtailed, users might resort to social media platforms to fulfill their unmet needs for self-expression. In such cases, however, the user uptake of social media would be increased if the virtual culture is significantly different from the national culture. Whichever of the above two cases turns out to be valid, understanding this underlying tension between national and virtual culture would be key to the profitability and continued existence of social media platforms.

Understanding the interplay between the cultural dimensions and the users online might also help the users of social media platforms secure their gratifications to a better extent. Certain social media encourage specific manifestations of cultural dimensions (e.g., high power distance, low masculinity, strong individualism, etc.) and expect that the users would follow the same cultural norms. While exceptions exist in all user bases, it might be in the best interests of the users to acknowledge these differences and act differently on various social media platforms. This would guarantee a smooth and effective flow of information and a gradual and fruitful increase of the user's social influence, which has been known to be a key gratification that is sought by the users of social media.

Social networks have emerged over the past decade from being a strictly customer-to-customer platform to an increasingly popular business-to-customer platform as well. Millions of companies, large and small, reach out to a potential consumer base through interactions on social network sites. However, these interactions with potential and present customers are by no means cheap and often involve a significant investment of time, financial resources, and opportunity costs. To effectively reach out to their consumers, several organizations have resorted to what is called targeted marketing via social media. Knowing the cultural motivations of social media users and the

cultural undertones emphasized by social media platforms would immensely benefit these organizations in better marshaling their resources. In short, understanding the sociocultural dimensions at play on social network sites would largely help improve the profitability of all stakeholders in the social networking business.

This study also proposes several policy-related implications, along with the growing need for cultural sensitivity online. Policymakers can collaborate with social media platforms to develop cultural sensitivity guidelines, ensuring that platform policies respect diverse cultural norms and values. This approach promotes positive interactions and minimizes conflicts among users. Moreover, creating a culturally aware and harmonious digital environment while safeguarding the rights of users from diverse cultural backgrounds is essential. For example, fostering cultural diversity within tech development teams is crucial for designing culturally inclusive platforms. Initiatives to diversify the tech workforce can lead to the development of services that inherently incorporate cultural sensitivity. Importantly, Policymakers should also consider strategies to prevent cross-cultural cyberbullying and harassment, including the development of reporting systems for culturally insensitive content and users.

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Submitted: April 13, 2023; 1st Revision: September 22, 2023; Accepted: October 26, 2023