

Consumer Behavior and Cultural Factors in Social Media: A Cross-Cultural Comparative Study

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Abstract: In the digital age, social media has become a transformative force, reshaping consumer interactions with products, brands, and services. This essay delves into the intricate interplay between cultural factors and consumer behavior within the realm of social media, focusing on a cross-cultural comparative study between Japan and the United States. The study explores consumer behavior through the lens of psychological, social, and cultural influences. It investigates how psychological aspects like motivation and attitudes, as well as social factors such as family and reference groups, are intertwined with cultural dimensions to shape consumer preferences. This essay employs a comparative approach, focusing on Japan and the United States as distinct cultural contexts. By applying Hofstede's cultural dimensions model, it dissects differences in individualism, power distance, masculinity-femininity, long-term orientation, uncertainty avoidance, and indulgence-restraint. The findings reveal significant disparities in consumer behavior on social media between these two nations. Cultural factors profoundly impact user engagement, content resonance, and purchasing decisions on social media platforms. This study underscores the indispensable role of cultural factors in molding consumer behavior in the digital age. Understanding and adapting to cultural nuances are imperative for marketers seeking to effectively engage and influence diverse global audiences through social media channels.

Keywords: social media, consumer behaviour, cultural preferences

1. Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of consumer behavior and marketing, social media plays the role of a transformative force, continuously reshaping consumer interactions with products, brands, and services [1]. The pervasive influence of online platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Threads has surpassed geographic boundaries, connecting marketers with a global audience [2]. However, the significance of cultural factors in marketing remains an important consumer behaviour dimension that massively influences digital realms. This essay will focus on the intricate interplay between cultural factors and consumer behavior within the realm of social media. The essay will present a cross-cultural comparative study that unravels the variations in consumer choices due the cultural factors and their impact on social media interactions. In this study, Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions will be used to conduct a comparative analysis of Japan and the United States.

2. Understanding Consumer Behaviour

Before moving on with the essay, it is essential to understand consumer behaviour and the factors that influence it. As per the literature, The study of consumer behavior explores the decision-making process individuals undergo when selecting products or services to fulfill their personal requirements [3]. It provides valuable insight to marketers regarding consumer choices which helps in resource allocation and product and service design [4]. Similarly, in the social media context, comprehension of consumer behavior is more significant as social media platforms can be used as powerful tools that influence purchase decisions, shape consumer perceptions, and foster brand loyalty [5]. At its essence, consumer behavior is merely a multidimensional force including various factors that drive consumer purchasing decisions. Consumer purchasing choices and preferences are driven by social, cultural, and psychological factors [5]. Therefore, it is essential to understand the relevance of these factors to understand consumer behavior patterns in the digital age.

The psychological influences the emotional and cognitive processes that influence consumer decision-making. More specifically, the psychological factors include individuals' motivation, perceptions, needs, and attitudes toward a product and its offerings [6]. Marketers use online platforms such as Instagram to craft tailored content to attract their target market by creating persuasive messages and activating emotional responses that help entice and engage users [7]. The literature identifies consumer behaviour as a social aspect stating that consumers' purchasing decisions are strongly influenced by their immediate social circle, family structures, social class, and reference groups [8]. There is no doubt that social media serves as a conduit for distributing social influence among users [9]. Social media platforms are used to interact with peers, gain exposure to trends, and seek recommendations. Marketers use viral marketing strategies and user-generated content to connect with potential customers and influence social behaviors, ultimately influencing consumer behaviour patterns [9].

Last but not least, cultural factors are perhaps the most prominent factor that impact consumer buying decisions and therefore, is the focus of this essay. Culture influences all aspects of life as it encompasses consumers' beliefs, shared values and perceptions, customs, traditions, and norms [10]. Therefore, they might be strongly influence consumer preferences which greatly impacts consumer behaviour and purchase decisions. Consequently, cultural marketing campaigns are a norm on social media channels, allowing marketers to understand the diverse ways in which individuals belonging to different cultures respond to social media marketing [1]. Social media platforms allow marketers to use one channel to engage psychological, cultural, and social factors that directly impact consumers' purchasing decisions and behaviours [1].

3. Cultural Factors in Consumer Behaviour

As explained culture is a powerful force that influences the everyday lives of consumers, therefore, it is a considerable factor when shaping consumer behaviour around different parts of the world [9]. Marketers ensure that they include cultural factors when designing marketing campaigns to attract customers and influence buying behavior because culture has a strong influence on individuals' preferences, values, and consumption patterns [11]. For example, for all consumers, however, cultural differences result in different types and styles of clothing being selected by consumers from different backgrounds. The literature defines culture as an intricate web of shared beliefs, customs, values, traditions, religion, and symbols that are used to identify a group or society [11]. Hence, cultural norms determine the norms within a society. For example, people living in Western countries like contemporary designs while Eastern attire usually includes heavy embroideries, depicting the impact of cultural factors on consumer preferences [12]. It also dictates whether some trends are acceptable

within a society or are considered taboo [12]. Accordingly, cultural factors include cultural preferences and tolerance. Understanding these factors allows marketers to design products, services, and marketing campaigns that bring value to the customers while also keeping their cultural limitations in mind. Also, cultural factors allow individuals to create their identity. Marketing campaigns that resonate with customers' identity are likely to be successful and achieve positive outcomes, influencing consumer behaviour and their purchasing decision.

In today's dynamic and globalized business environment, ignoring cultural relevance while influencing consumer behavior is not acceptable [8]. Also, the digital realm allows marketers to interact and engage with a diverse audience through social media channels, bringing cultures around the world into close proximity. Hence, understanding the cultural manifestations within the social media context has become very important in recent years. Marketers can use social media to provoke and create a cultural identity that directly impacts consumer behaviour by creating culturally relevant content. As social media transcends geographic limitations, it has become a powerful tool used for cultural interactions and expressions. Therefore, cross-cultural diversity and dynamics should be closely analyzed before engaging with the global audience to influence consumer behaviour.

4. The Role of New Media in Consumer Behaviour

There is no doubt that network streaming media is an undeniable force in today's dynamic business environment. It has not only transformed how individuals interact but also influenced how they access information. Ultimately, influencing consumer purchase decisions. It can be argued that network streaming media platforms could be referred to as dynamic platforms exerting influence on various aspects of the consumer decision-making process. Social media allows marketers to create content personalization and recommendation algorithms. This means that social media has the ability to personalize content according to users' behaviors, demographics, search history, and preferences [13]. Also, the users' interactions such as the number of likes, shares, and comments are used by recommendation algorithms to curate content that aligns with the users' interests. Hence, social media plays a crucial role in enhancing user experience and directly impacts consumer behaviour through exposure to products and services that align with consumers' preferences [13].

Similarly, social media provides social proof for the users. Consumers use this channel to seek social proof of their interested product or service [14]. They assess product reviews, recommendations, and testimonials before making the final purchase to ensure the quality. Hence, social media channels are used to provide social proof that directly impacts consumer behavior. For example, if a user is interested in a certain smartphone but receives negative reinforcement from social media channels by other consumers, they may switch their choice and vice versa [14]. Additionally, social media helps in creating user-generated content such as peer interactions. Businesses that leverage and encourage user-generated content create a living proof of product usage which helps build brand credibility and trust, ultimately influencing consumer behaviour and purchasing power [14].

Influencer marketing is also worth mentioning. It is a new type of marketing that only came into the limelight with social media exposure [15]. Influencers are used by marketers to promote and advocate products to followers on diverse online platform channels such as Instagram and YouTube [15]. This is how influencer marketing is used to evolve and shape consumer behaviour. The authenticity and reliability of the influencers help them resonate with their followers, also allowing them to impact purchase decisions. Brands use influencer marketing as a powerful medium to connect with the masses on a personal level [15]. Moreover, social media also plays a vital role in consumer behavior by creating interactive engagement. Social platforms offer a two-way communication podium for consumers and brands, which allows customers to inquire about product offerings, provide feedback and recommendations, and seek clarity [16]. Social media also allows brands and marketers to offer 24/7 responses to customers, resulting in enhanced customer trust. A powerful

customer services platform helps positively impact purchasing decisions [16]. Social media plays a strong role in viral marketing and trends which further highlights its significance in influencing consumer behavior patterns [16]. Ultimately, viral marketing and trends help create sudden spikes in consumer interest levels, ultimately impacting consumer behaviour.

Furthermore, social media serves as a canvas for evoking customer emotions, resulting in emotional engagement. Emotional engagement is a critical aspect that influences consumer behaviors through humor, thought-provoking messages, or sentimental stories [7]. Emotional engagement often leaves a lasting impact on customers, allowing brands to influence brand perceptions and consumer loyalty. Also, the integration of e-commerce into social media platforms has facilitated purchases. It offers a seamless shopping experience for the users, sometimes also ensuring impulse buying among customers, further influencing consumer behaviour [2].

5. Cross-Cultural Comparative Study

As explained the digital landscape, which includes social media channels cannot reject the power of cultural factors in influencing consumer behaviors [1]. To unravel the multi-layered relationship between cultural factors and consumer behavior on digital platforms, a cross-cultural comparative study has been conducted which focuses on two influential and distinctive societies, namely, the United States and Japan. The selection of countries is based on cultural differences and economic standing. The comparative analysis uses the Hofstede cultural dimension model to understand consumer behavior and cultural factors in social media.

5.1. Hofstede Model of Cultural Dimensions

The Hofstede model of cultural dimensions is a seminal framework used by businesses to build cultural intelligence and understand cross-cultural dynamics across borders [17]. It also helps in building a comparative analysis. The framework encompasses six significant cultural dimensions:

1. Individualism Vs. Collectivism: The degree to which a society operate on an individual level or collective level [18].

2. Power Distance: The degree to which people in a society understand and accept the unequal distribution of power [19].

3. Masculinity Vs. Femininity: A masculine society follow traditional masculine values such as competitiveness, assertiveness and pursuit of success while a feminine society showcase attributes such as cooperation, quality of life and nurturing [18].

4. Long-term Orientation Vs. Short-term Orientation: Time dimension refers to time orientation by representing if the members of a society indulge in short-term planning or long-term planning [20].

5. Uncertainty Avoidance: It measures the extent to which a society tolerates risks, uncertainty and ambiguity [19].

6. Indulgence Vs. Restraint: It refers to the degree to which a society allows gratification of human desires and freedom of thought [18].

5.2. Comparative Analysis

Both Japan and the United States are powerful and influential global economies, which exhibit very different cultural norms and values as depicted in Figure 1.

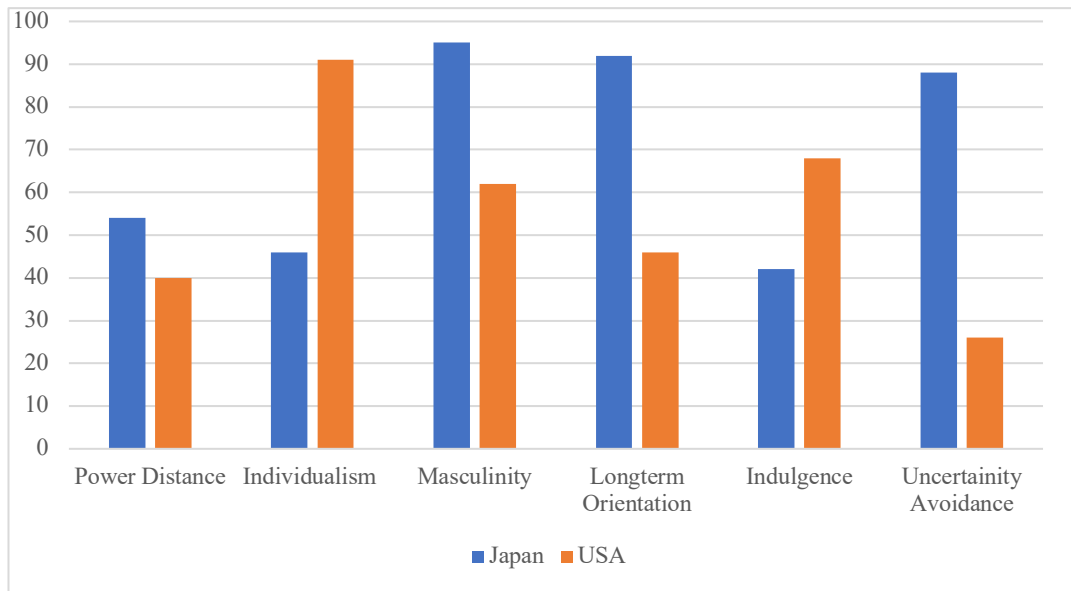


Figure 1: Hofstede Model: Comparative Analysis (Japan and the U.S.) [18].

Japan showcases masculine traits while the U.S. exhibits feminine traits. Similarly, Japan follows collectivism while America is a strong believer in individualism [18]. As shown in Figure 1, both countries vary in all cultural dimensions. The Japanese consumer respects unequal distribution of power while the American consumer does not share this ideology. Similarly, Japanese consumer purchasing patterns are influenced by long-term orientation while American consumers adopt short-term orientation when making purchasing decisions [18]. Also, U.S. consumers believe they say matters and they have freedom of thought however it is not the same for a Japanese consumer [18]. These cultural variations highlight the differentiating consumer behavior patterns that are obvious in social media interactions within these two societies. Further cementing that cultural variations have a strong influence on consumer behaviour and purchasing decisions [18]. Despite disparities, many Japanese companies are successfully performing on American social media channels and vice versa. This is done by mirroring cultural norms when connecting with the target market on social media channels [19].

6. Practical Implications for Social Media Marketing

In light of Hofstede's model, it is deduced that cultural elements are quite powerful in influencing consumer decisions. Therefore, practical implications in social media marketing are crucial for marketers to create culturally intelligent marketing campaigns when engaging and influencing customers. It is recommended that adaptation of content and messages is critical for producing positive consumer patterns [20]. For instance, as Japan is a society that highly avoids uncertainty and collectivism and engages in long-term orientation, it is advised to craft content that emphasizes product reliability, quality, and long-term benefits when running social media campaigns for Japanese consumers [18]. Marketers need to focus on building credibility and trust through social media with meticulous attention to detail. However, when targeting American customers, who have lower uncertainty avoidance and focus on individualism and short-term orientation, marketers should emphasize personal achievements, individuality, and immediate benefits of a product or service in their social media content [20]. This can be done by encouraging user-generated content such as individual success stories and concise messages to capture attention.

Also, the influencer selection should also vary when targeting different audiences that belong to different cultures. For example, an American influencer may not be able to entice the Japanese audience and vice versa. Therefore, it is recommended that marketers pay extra attention to which influencer they select, keeping cultural factors in mind to attract and influence consumer behavior. Similarly, the selection of communication styles when interacting with social media users also matters [12]. Keeping in mind the score of Japan on all cultural dimensions, the communication style on social media for the Japanese audience should use clear and detailed communication which emphasizes reliability and security [18]. The language should be polite and honor power distance. On the other hand, when communicating with American users on social media, open and direct communication should be encouraged [12]. Social media campaigns should also foster friendly and informal communication to attract customers and influence consumer behaviour.

7. Conclusion

In summary, it can be concluded that cultural dimensions have a significant influence in guiding consumer behaviour and social media interactions. Therefore, in today's dynamic world, it is essential to ensure that culturally intelligent consumer behavior marketing policies are created by multinational organizations that offer products and services to a diverse audience. This will allow them to drive social media engagement, enhance brand loyalty and ultimately, influence consumer behavior and purchasing decisions.

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