Cross-cultural differences in self-expression on SNS:
The role of relational mobility

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Introduction

Individualism vs. Collectivism
Chu & Choi (2010)

North Americans on Facebook

East Asians on Renren
Moving away from cultural values...

Self-expression: Back to basics...

  - Impressions are crafted: the goal is sociality and status (c.f. Bond, 2013).

- Think of self-expression as adaptive strategies to increase sociality and status in a society or social environment.

- Socio-ecological approach: Human behavior as adaptive strategies to social structural incentives (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Oishi & Graham, 2010; Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994)

Socio-ecological approach and relational mobility

- Relational mobility: The degree to which there are opportunities to form new or sever current relationships in a society or social context (Falk et al., 2009; Schug et al., 2009, 2010; Szycer et al., 2012; Wang & Leung, 2010; Yuki et al., 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relational Mobility</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Nth. America</td>
<td>East Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for forming new relationships</td>
<td>Relational “Open Market”</td>
<td>Relational “Closed Market”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of forming/leaving relationships</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Relational mobility and social strategies

- **High relational mobility environment = Open interpersonal market**
  - To form and maintain desirable relationships, oneself must also be desirable to others (Falk et al., 2009; Schug, Yuki, & Maddux, 2010; Yuki, Sato, Takemura, & Oishi, 2010)
  - Importance of choosing and being chosen.
  - Desirability = Status and similarity

- Need to actively ‘promote’ one’s superiority, interests, opinions.

- **Low relational mobility = closed interpersonal market**
  - Interpersonal relationships are ascribed, and long-lasting, leaving is difficult.
  - To maintain good relationships, little need to ‘promote’ one’s superiority or similarity to others.

- Alternative relationships are few, means disharmony is costly.
  - Avoidance of behavior which could cause status competition and jealousy (such as boasting of one’s skills and making clear one’s opinions) (Komatsu et al., 2013)
Behavior on Facebook (PREDICTION)

Assumption: Facebook networks reflect offline networks
(Oltson, 2006; Thomson & Ito, 2012; Levinson, 2013)

- High relational mobility society (the US)
  - Maintaining/acquiring high status relationships: Self-promotion
  - Maintaining/acquiring similar relationships: Willingness to risk social tension

- Low relational mobility societies (Japan)
  - Relationship maintenance and improvement: Avoidance of self-promotion, more sharing of non-controversial content

Predictions

P1 US Facebook users will post more self-promoting content on Facebook, compared with Japanese users.

P2 Japanese users will avoid posting socially controversial content more than US users, and will post more every-day content.

P3 The above cultural differences will be mediated by relational mobility.
Method – Web survey

- Facebook users
  - Japan: 95 (M_age = 33.9, Lancers.jp)
  - United States: 95 (M_age = 32.9, Amazon Mechanical Turk)

- Dependent variable | Self-expression (all 7pt Likert)
  1. Self-promotion (3 items, α > .62)
     - E.g., “If I was to get a promotion at work, I would share this on Facebook,” “If I was to win some kind of award, I would share this on Facebook.”
  2. Conflict-avoidance (3 items, α > .67)
     - E.g., “I do not post things on Facebook that I know will get me into quarrels with my friends,” “I don’t post status updates on Facebook regarding issues where public opinion is clearly divided.”
  3. Life-sharing (4 items, α > .66)
     - E.g., “On Facebook, I post information about events I have participated in,” “When I am with friends, I will let people know on Facebook.”

Method

- Mediator variable
  - Relational mobility scale (Yuki et al., 2007)
    - Short version (6 items, α > .79)
    - E.g., “They (people around you), have many opportunities to meet new people,” “They are able to choose, according to their preference, what groups and organizations they belong to.”
**Results | Testing the social graph assumption**

Facebook network = offline network?

*Place to meet new people* vs. *Place to maintain offline relationships*

**Relationship maintenance**
- Japanese: 81% (78 people)
- American: 93% (88 people)

**Social graph based SNS behavior**

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**Results | Cultural differences**

**Relational mobility:**
- Japan (3.07) < USA (4.37), p < .01, d = -.49

**Self-promotion**
- Japan: d = -0.93
- USA: d = 0.45
  - p < .01**, .001***

**Conflict avoidance**
- Japan: d = 0.37
Results | Mediating effect of relational mobility

\[ \beta = 0.445^{**} \]
\[ \beta = 0.769^{***} \]
\[ \beta = 0.711^{***} \]
\[ \beta = 0.177^* \]

**Indirect effect:** \[ \beta = 0.079 \text{ (95\% CI } = 0.009, 0.202) \]
(Gender controlled)

Conflict avoidance: Indirect eff. \[ \beta = 0.033 \text{ (95\% CI } = -0.033, 0.143) \]

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Results | Within-country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Self-promotion</th>
<th>Conflict-avoidance</th>
<th>Life-share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Mob.</td>
<td>.31^{**}</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.23*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Mob.</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: p < .10, **: p < .05, ***: p < .01. Controlling for gender
Discussion

• Results overview
  1. Status appeal: Americans > Japanese
  2. Conflict-avoidance: Japanese > Americans
  3. Status appeal difference partially mediated by relational mobility

• Fits with our theory of self-promotion being a strategy for attaining status and sociality in high relational mobility environments.

• Implication
  • Targeted advertising
    ➢ Effectiveness in personalization may be affected.

Overview (cont.)

• Within Japan, relational mobility x self-promotion correlation is weak
  1. Low sample size?
  2. Lack of social skills (adaptive skills) for low-relational mobility Japanese?

• Limitation
  • Social-graph based SNS only
  • More anonymous SNS will be different
    • Twitter, Mobagee-town...
Thank you for listening

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Thanks to:
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References: