

## **The Influence of Cultures on SNS Usage: Comparing Mixi in Japan and Facebook in the U.S.**

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*The purpose of this study is to explore and identify the cultural influence on people's Social Networking Sites (SNS) usage. Using Hofstede's individualism/collectivism and Hall's high/low context cultural values, this study examines the content of comments on online communities in Mixi, a SNS in Japan, and Facebook. A content analysis of comments that appeared on the SNS communities of three car brands (Lexus, Cadillac, and BMW) revealed that Mixi users and Facebook users differ in the use of visually oriented information and in the types of comments they wrote. Specifically, Mixi users used significantly more visually oriented information in comments than Facebook users. In addition, comments by Mixi users were more likely to ask for and provide advice and information, while comments by Facebook users were more likely to express their feeling towards the brands.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Within the past several years, the popularity of social networking sites (SNS) became a worldwide phenomenon. As of June 2008, there are more than 580 million SNS users worldwide and 78% of them are living outside of the U.S. (comScore, 2008). Given their increasing popularity around the world, SNS hold a lot of potential benefits for companies in international public relations. By utilizing SNS and facilitating two-way communication with their publics outside the country, companies could have better understanding about their international publics and their images among international markets.

In fact, SNS have been getting attention from companies as a tool for cultivating relationships with their publics in the past few years (Wright & Hinson, 2009). Several studies have examined the use of SNS in public relations practices and provided valuable findings and suggestions about adopting SNS in public relations (e.g., Curtis, Edwards, Fraser, Gudelsky, Holmquist, Thornton, Sweetser, 2010; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008). Especially, much attention was paid to investigate how companies use SNS's online communities, such as Facebook groups, to communicate with their publics (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009).

However, most of the studies were conducted in the U.S. context, and little is known about what SNS look like and how SNS have been used in other countries. This study, therefore, is designed to fill in this gap by comparing people's communication styles in brands' existing online communities on Mixi, the most popular SNS in Japan, and on Facebook in the U.S. By adopting Hofstede's and Hall's cultural dimensions, the study explores and identifies the cultural influence on people's communication styles on SNS.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Social Networking Sites*

SNS are a relatively new online communication media and have just started to be utilized in the public relations field. Because of this short history, how can we define SNS is still under investigations. Boyd and Ellison (2007), for example, proposed that SNS is “a 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 are made by others within the system.” According to Downes (2005), SNS is “a collection of individuals linked together by a set of relations.”

Overall, SNS can be regarded as websites that increase and enhance connections between users by providing them with several convenient tools to facilitate their communications with others. In a typical SNS, users have their own profile page where they list their interests or background information. They can also search for friends, post comments, share pictures, and form and participate in interest groups. Through SNS, users can easily maintain and build networks with others.

Given SNS's ability to facilitate communications among users, SNS offer many opportunities for companies to cultivate relationships with their publics. Recent studies in the public relations have proposed some frameworks of how company can utilize SNS in their public relations practices (e.g., Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). However, much research related to SNS conducted in public relations field is designed to analyze SNS from the companies' perspective, and little is known about how users use SNS to interact with companies and brands. Therefore, this study will investigate SNS from the users' perspective.

### *Mixi, Facebook, and the reasons to compare them*

Mixi started its service in 2004 and soon became the most popular SNS in Japan. In March 2009, Mixi had more than 16.3 million members, and 88.5% of Japanese SNS users had joined Mixi (Internet Association Japan, 2007). Mixi is especially popular among teens and 20- year olds who account for more than 60% of total Mixi users (Mixi, 2007). The founders of Mixi were influenced by the American SNS Friendster, and decided to provide the same service in Japan. However, instead of using the same function and layout that Friendster did at that time, they “glocalized” Friendster in order to make Mixi fit into Japanese society (E-Business Laboratory, 2005).

Facebook, a popular SNS in the U.S., started its service in 2004. Despite the presence of many other strong competitors such as Myspace, Facebook increased its users in a rapid pace, and in 2009, it has more than 60 million active users in the U.S. and 300 million active users worldwide (Facebook, 2009; Inside Facebook, 2009). Facebook is especially popular among college students in the U.S., and people between 18 to 25 years old account for 44% of its total number of U.S. users (Inside Facebook, 2009).

There are some advantages to comparing those two SNS in this study. One is the similarity of the main users' age groups. Both of them are especially popular among teens and 20-year olds, and this will reduce the influence of the age variable in the study. Another reason is that both of them are used for more general reasons compared with other SNS such as Myspace which is more for niches who enjoy sharing information about music with others. Those fundamental similarities of the two SNS will provide more reliability to the study, and make the cultural influence on SNS more salient.

#### *Research in Online and International Public Relations*

The utilizations of online communication tools in the practice of public relations have been discussed by many researchers in the last decade (e.g., Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007; Esrock & Leichty, 1998; Kelleher & Miller, 2006; Kirat, 2007). Kent and Taylor (1998) stressed the advantages of using the Internet to practice dialogic communication, which is defined as “any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions” (p. 325). They introduced a strategic framework to facilitate relationship building with publics through the Internet and proposed five principles for successful integration of dialogic public relations and the Internet. Those are dialogic loop, the generation of return visit, the usefulness of information, the intuitiveness/ease of the interface, and the rule of conservation of visitors. Many studies have followed this framework and reinforced the idea of using Internet for enhancing and improving dialogic communication and relationship management (e.g., Jo & Kim, 2003; Naudéa, Froneman, & Atwood, 2004; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007)

Culture is another topic that needs to be addressed in the domain of online public relations. Although the importance of recognizing cultural influences on public relations practices has been already acknowledged in the field (e.g., Curtin & Gaither, 2007), the nature of Internet as an international medium makes culture as much important issue to be discussed in the context of online public relations. Without knowing how online communication is influenced by cultures, this might cause misunderstanding between companies and their foreign publics, and therefore prevent companies from achieving public relations goals.

A number of researchers have conducted cross-cultural comparisons of online communications in various topics, such as website designs (e.g., Tian, 2006), website contents (e.g., Okazaki & Rivas, 2002; Wurtz, 2006), e-commerce (e.g., Gong, 2009, Yun, Park, & Ha, 2008), and online avatars (e.g., Koda, Ishida, Rehm, & André, 2009). Hofstede's (1980) and Hall's (1976) cultural dimensions were often used in these studies to provide theoretical understanding of cultural differences and their influences. Recently, Kang and Mastin (2008) employed Hofstede's cultural dimensions in a comparative analysis of international tourism public relations websites in 44 countries. The study found that the differences of power distance (the extent to which a society tolerates hierarchical differences) and individualism/collectivism affect websites' design and content. Similarly, Pan and Xu (2009) analyzed corporate websites from the U.S. and China. The results indicated that U.S. corporate websites offered direct and interactive online marketing space for communication between marketers and

consumers, while Chinese corporate websites provided more online interactive space for consumer-consumer interaction. They attributed the results on the differences of power distance and individualism/collectivism cultural orientations between the U.S. and China.

Among the several cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (1980) and Hall (1976), this study adopts the concepts of individualism/collectivism and high/low context orientations to examine how culture could influence people's communication style in brands' SNS online communities. Individualism/collectivism is a cultural dimension which explains how people in different cultures manage relationships with others (Hickson & Pugh, 2001). Thus, it is especially appropriate to use this dimension for this study since SNS is all about socializing with others. High/low context is another cultural dimension which reflects the influence of culture on people's relationship management strategy (Hickson & Pugh, 2001). Especially, high/low context explains whether one culture prefers direct or indirect communications and text-based or symbol-based messages (Mooij, 2005). This dimension can help us to assess the differences in writing style of messages in SNS, and therefore is a relevant cultural dimension for this study.

#### *Individualism / Collectivism and High/low Context Communication*

Individualism/collectivism is one of the cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (1980). In an individualistic culture, people are "I" conscious. The ties between individuals are loose, and people tend to be independent. Because individuals in this type of culture regard their individual value as the most important, they don't hesitate to express their private opinion. In addition, there is less mutual obligation in individualistic cultures, and accomplishing personal goals are more important than in-group goals. The division between the private space and the public domain are strict, and therefore people tend to avoid asking personal questions and hesitate to share their own personal information with others, especially someone they are not familiar with (Ferle and Kim, 2006; Hickson & Pugh, 2003; Hofstede, 1980; Mooij, 2005).

In a collectivistic culture, on the other hand, people are likely to be interdependent. The emphasis is on belonging and the idea is to be a good member. The priority is given to relationship with people, and therefore in-group goals are more important than personal goals in collectivistic culture. Because of this interdependence, the identity of individuals in this type of culture is based on the social system. When people in collectivistic culture introduce themselves to others, they tend to provide many background information about themselves since these information are important to show who they are. In addition, the distinctions between the private space and the public space are blurred in this culture. Thus people in collectivistic culture feel more comfortable about sharing private information with others than people in individualistic culture (Ferle & Kim, 2006; Hickson & Pugh, 2003; Hofstede, 1980; Mooij, 2005).

Hall (1976) proposed high context and low context as a framework to help understanding the differences of communication style among cultures. In high context cultures, people prefer to use indirect and vague messages. Meaning of a message is not always explicitly manifested, but rather most of the information are hidden in the

context or internalized in the person. Thus, time is needed to program messages in high context cultures. Moreover, individuals in this type of culture prefer to use visual information. Symbols are often utilized in high context cultures since symbols convey shared meaning in a society. In low context culture, direct and straightforward expression is preferred. Messages are more likely to be informative in nature in order to ensure that the listener receives the message exactly as it was sent. People in low context culture prefer explicit verbal message rather than symbols since visually oriented communication brings ambiguity (Ferle & Kim, 2006; Wurtz, 2006; Mooij, 2005).

Japan and the U.S. are different in both individualism/collectivism and high/low context communication. In Hofstede's (1980) study, Japan and other Asian countries score low in individualistic index, and therefore are classified as collectivistic culture. Japan scores 46 in individualism index whereas the U.S. scores 91 which is the highest number among all countries in his study. In addition, Japan has been described as high context culture, while the U.S. has been classified as low-context culture in previous studies (Hall & Hall 1990; Mooij, 2005). Given the differences of cultural values between Japan and the U.S., the following research question is presented.

**RQ1: What are the differences between Mixi and Facebook in terms of how users use these two SNS to communicate each other?**

Particularly this study proposes two hypotheses about how individualism / collectivism and high/low context communication affect people's communication styles in SNS. In the context of SNS, the differences of individualistic and collectivistic cultures could be manifested in users' behaviors of disclosing personal information. As it was discussed above, sharing background information, such as where they are living, is a way for showing who they are in collectivistic cultures. Therefore, SNS users in collectivistic cultures would more likely to disclose their personal information than those in individualistic cultures.

**H1: Mixi users will share information about themselves more than Facebook users.**

If the communication in SNS has influence from high and low context cultural value, there should be more visually oriented information, such as photographs and emoticons, in high context culture countries than low context culture countries. In fact, several studies have showed this pattern in online communications (Ferle and Kim, 2006; Wurtz, 2006). Therefore the hypothesis related to high and low context culture value is;

**H2: Comments in Mixi will have more visually oriented information than those in Facebook.**

## METHOD

To answer the stated research question and hypotheses, a content analysis was conducted of comments gathered from online communities existing on Mixi and Facebook. After taking nationality and familiarity of brands in both countries into consideration, communities for three car brands, Lexus (TOYOTA), Cadillac (GM), and BMW were chosen for this study. There are two types of communities on Facebook; Facebook Groups and Facebook Pages. They are similar in nature, however, they are slightly different in terms of functionalities and how they are used. Facebook Groups are similar to a typical virtual community where people who have similar interests become the members of the groups and share information with each other online. Facebook Pages, on the other hand, are used more as a place for disseminating information from the creator of the page to “fans” which refers to people who joined the page. The creators of brands’ Facebook Pages are often the staff of the companies who are dedicated to manage the pages. In this study, only Facebook Groups are used for analysis since these are more equivalent with online communities existing on Mixi, and therefore are more appropriate to be compared.

The study firstly analyzed the functionality the communities offer to users (e.g., places to put comments and links of outside information) in order to find overall interface differences between the two SNS. In addition, the study will analyze comments that appear on discussion boards (and “walls” for Facebook) in order to find whether there are differences between Mixi users and Facebook users in terms of the use of visually oriented information, disclosing their personal information, and what types of comments they write in SNS online communities.

### *Data Collection*

One SNS community from each brand in Mixi and Facebook was selected for the analysis (total of six communities). Among many online communities associated with each of the three car brands on Mixi and Facebook, one was selected by entering each brand’s name on the search box of Mixi and Facebook. The community which had the largest membership was chosen for analysis. As a result, the numbers of members in the three Mixi communities were 13,213 for Lexus, 6,101 for Cadillac, and 18,770 for BMW. For the three Facebook communities, the members were 5,567 for Lexus, 3,108 for Cadillac, and 5,927 for BMW.

Fifty comments were chosen from each community. For Mixi communities, 50 comments were extracted from each of the first 50 threads (one comment for each thread) that appeared on the discussion boards. For Facebook communities, 50 comments were selected from both discussion boards and “walls”. Twenty five comments were chosen from the first 25 threads that appeared on the discussion board, and other 25 comments were chosen from the first 25 comments that appeared on the walls. If a Facebook Group didn’t have more than 25 topics on discussion board, the number of comments collected from the discussion board was the number of the threads that appeared on the discussion board.

The procedure for choosing one comment from each thread is as follows. Firstly, each topic was assigned with a number from 1 to 10 according to the order in which the threads were updated. Among many comments that appeared in a thread, the ten newest comments were assigned with a number from 1 to 10 according to the order in which the comment were posted. The comment chosen for analysis was the one which had the number corresponding to the number assigned for each thread. If the thread had fewer comments than the number assigned for the thread, the count was repeated until the assigned number was reached. For example, if a thread was assigned with the number of 1 (or 3), the comment which posted most recently (or the third most recent comment) at that time was chosen for analysis. If a thread only had five comments while the thread was assigned the number 9, the fourth most recent comment was chosen for analysis. Same method was used for choosing a comment from a thread that appeared on the “walls” of Facebook communities.

Comments were collected during the last week of December, 2009. Those comments written in languages other than English were excluded from the pool. In addition, the comments that only had pictures were excluded from the pool as well. As a result, 150 comments were collected from both Mixi and Facebook communities, and the total number of comments analyzed in the study was 300.

#### *Coding procedure*

Coding was conducted by three bilinguals (Japanese and English) including the author herself. Two other coders were hired by the author and given a codebook containing definitions and coding rules. Comments selected from Mixi communities were coded by author and one of the two coders, and comments selected from Facebook communities were coded by the author and another coder. The author conducted the training and answered any questions regarding the definitions of the variables and procedures. Coders worked independently and were not permitted to discuss the SNS communities with each other.

The independent coders examined the presence of visually oriented information and personal information in each comment. In addition, the coders were also asked to identify the most salient comment types for each comment. Eight comment types were constructed for this study. Three of the eight comment types have subcategories and the coders were asked to identify these subcategories as well. The definitions for each variable are shown in Appendix 1.

Inter-coder reliability analysis was used to test internal consistency. Percentage agreements between the two coders were 100% for the use of visually oriented information, 98% to 100% for the disclosure of personal information in both Mixi and Facebook comments. For type of comments, the percent agreements were 85.3 % for Mixi comments and 87.3% for Facebook comments. These were well within acceptable limits (Kassarjian, 1977). For type of comments, disagreements occurred mainly between “offering advice and information” and “advertising something.” It was found that coders sometimes couldn’t easily discern whether the comments were simply written for

providing information to others or if there were advertising intentions behind the comments. The comments that had coding disagreements were rechecked and a final decision was made through discussion between the coders.

## RESULTS

### *Functionality*

The six SNS communities were analyzed regarding functionality. In terms of similarity between Mixi and Facebook communities, all of the six SNS communities had functions to show a general description of the community, who the members of the community are, and who the administrators of the community are. In addition, all the SNS communities provided discussion boards. One of the Mixi communities and two of the Facebook communities had a function to post external links related to the communities. However, for Mixi communities, links that could be added were restricted to links with Mixi communities, while for Facebook communities, there was no restriction. In terms of differences between the two SNS, all of the three Mixi communities had a function to show what other communities the members were in, and a function to list related events. Moreover, one of the three Mixi communities had a function to create and conduct surveys. These are the functions that couldn't be found in Facebook. On the other hand, all of the three Facebook communities had a "wall" where members can freely post the comments, and the dedicated places to update pictures and videos.

### *Disclosure of personal information*

The first hypothesis predicted that comments from Mixi communities would have more personal information than the comments from Facebook communities. Eight percent of the comments from Mixi and 4% of the comments from Facebook had at least one type of personal information. The most frequently mentioned type of personal information within the Mixi comments was "information about where he/she lives" (3.3%), followed by "family information" (2%), "gender" (0.7%), "age" (0.7%), and "other" (1.3%). Looking at the comments from Facebook, the results were first "information about where he/she lives" (2%), with "family information" (1.2%) next and then "occupation" (0.7%). There was no information about "occupation" mentioned in Mixi comments, and no information about "gender", "age", and "other" in Facebook comments. Chi-square test failed to find the significant difference in the disclosure of at least one type of personal information,  $\chi^2(1, N = 300) = 2.13, p > .10$ , and no significant differences was found among subcategories of personal information either. Therefore, H1 was rejected.

### *Use of visually oriented information*

The second hypothesis of this study predicted that comments that appeared in Mixi communities would have more visually oriented information than comments that appeared in Facebook communities. Among the 150 comments that were gathered from Mixi communities, 54% of the comments have at least one type of visually oriented information, 12% of the comments have photographs, 48.7% of the comments have emoticons, and no comments have other types of visually oriented information. For the 150 comments that were gathered from Facebook, 23.3 % of the comments have at least one type of visually oriented information, 12.7% of the comments have

photographs, 10.0% of the comments have emoticons, and 1.3% of the comments have other types of visually oriented information. Chi-square tests confirmed that Mixi and Facebook differed significantly in the use of at least one type of visually oriented information,  $\chi^2(1, N = 300) = 29.74, p < .01$ , and the use of emoticons,  $\chi^2(1, N = 300) = 54.10, p < .01$ . Therefore, H2 was supported.

*Type of comments*

Types of Comments	Mixi	Facebook	$\chi^2$ (df = 1)
1. Asking for advice and information	29 comments (19.3%)	12 comments (8%)	8.17*
2. Offering advice and information	54 (36%)	14 (9%)	30.42**
3. Showing negative feeling about the brands, companies, and shops	1 (1.3%)	5 (3.3%)	1.31
4. Showing positive feeling or support for the brands, companies, and shops	12 (8%)	46 (30.7%)	24.70**
5. Showing neutral feeling about the brands, companies, and shops	2 (1.3%)	11(7.3%)	6.51*
6. Advertising something	25 (16.7%)	37 (24.7%)	2.93
7. Showing opinion to comments wrote by others	17 (11.3%)	15 (10.0%)	0.14
8. Others	9 (6.0%)	10 (6.7%)	0.06

Table 1: Results for Type of Comments

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

Comments were further analyzed to examine whether there were differences among types of comments appearing Mixi and Facebook, respectively (Table 1). Chi-square tests revealed that overall there was a significant difference between the two SNS,  $\chi^2(1, N = 300) = 60.52, p < .01$ . Mixi had significantly more comments than Facebook for “asking for advice and information” (19.3% vs. 8%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 300) = 8.17, p < .05$ , and “offering advice and information” (36.0% vs. 9.3%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 300) = 30.42, p < .01$ . On the other hand, Facebook had significantly more comments than Mixi for “showing positive feeling or support for the brands, companies, and shops” (30.7% vs. 8%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 300) = 24.70, p < .01$ , and “showing neutral feeling about the brands, companies, and shops” (7.3% vs. 1.3%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 300) = 6.51, p < .05$ . No significant differences were found for “showing negative feeling about the brands, companies, and shops”,  $\chi^2(1, N = 300) = 1.31, p > .10$ , “advertising something”,  $\chi^2(1, N = 300) = 2.93, p > .05$ , and “showing opinion to comments wrote by others”,  $\chi^2(1, N = 300) = 0.14, p > .10$  (Table 1). However, there was a significant difference for “showing appreciation for the comments written by others”,  $\chi^2(1, N = 300) = 7.64, p < .01$ , which is a subcategory of “showing opinion to comments written by others.”

In summary, the results of this study suggest that there were differences between Mixi users and Facebook users in terms of the use of visually oriented information and type of comments. Mixi users used significantly more emoticons than Facebook users when

they make comments in SNS communities. In addition, Mixi users made more comments about asking information and providing information to other community members, and Facebook users made more comments that show their positive and neutral feeling about brands, companies, and shops.

## **CONCLUSION**

SNS are gaining popularity among various countries in the world, and this makes SNS a valuable medium to communicate effectively with consumers overseas. However, there appears to be a lack of research examining how SNS are used differently among countries and cultures. In this study, two SNS from two different countries were analyzed, and the influence of culture on how people make comments on SNS were examined by adopting Hofstede's and Hall's cultural values. It was found that people in high context culture (Mixi users) tended to use more visually oriented information than people in low context culture (Facebook users) when they communicate with others in SNS.

Unexpectedly, no differences were found in terms of the amount of personal information written in the comments, although the study predicted that people in collectivistic culture (Mixi users) would disclose more personal information about themselves in SNS communities. Overall, there were only few comments that contained personal information among both Mixi comments and Facebook comments. This might be due to the fact that all of the three Mixi communities analyzed in this study had more than 6,000 members, and people might not feel comfortable disclosing their personal information in such an environment. An additional argument can be made that although sharing personal information is a way for people to show who they are in a collectivistic culture, it does not translate to the online environment. Future research could analyze different sizes and types of SNS communities in order to further understand people's behavior of disclosing personal information in different cultures.

The results of this study also revealed that the types of comments people wrote differed among Mixi and Facebook communities. Mixi users tended to write comments in SNS community that involved asking or providing advice and information, while Facebook users made comments because they want to express their feeling towards the brands. These behavioral differences between Mixi users and Facebook users might result from the differences of collectivistic and individualistic cultural values. In a country which has a collectivistic culture like Japan, people tend to be interdependent, and being a good member of a community is regarded as a virtue. The large number of comments asking or providing advice and information that were found in Mixi communities might be a manifestation of this collectivistic cultural value. Meanwhile, the individualistic culture is "I" conscious and there is less mutual obligation among people. This cultural value might influence Facebook users' behavior on SNS communities, and as a result, Facebook users tend to use SNS communities as a place for expressing their passions and opinions towards the product and brand, rather than sharing advice and useful information.

These findings suggest that when companies utilize SNS for communicating with their international publics, they need to know how the SNS were used differently among countries in order to have better understanding about international publics and build relationships with them effectively. For instance, given the differences in the use of visually oriented information and what people write as comments in SNS communities between Japan and the U.S, companies could position the Japanese SNS communities more as a place to clarify consumers' inquiries about the products, while providing more space where people can freely express their opinions towards the products in their U.S. SNS communities. In addition, companies need to understand the importance and meaning of using visually oriented information, especially emoticons, when they communicate with consumers from high context cultures.

#### *Limitations and Future Research*

This study has several limitations. First of all, since this study only analyzed the SNS communities of automobiles, the results may not be generalized to other types of products' SNS communities. Future research could analyze low involvement products, such as instant coffee or shampoo, and examine whether people in individualistic/collectivistic and high/low context cultures would comment differently in those products' SNS communities.

In addition, although Japan is recognized as a typical collectivistic and high context culture country, and the U.S. is seen as a representative of individualistic and low context culture country, the results of this study might not be applicable to other countries due to the other social and infrastructural differences. Future studies need to examine SNS communities in various countries in order to clarify the effect of individualistic/collectivistic and high/low context cultural values on people's behavior of using SNS communities.

Lastly, since there is no geographic boundary on the Internet, people can easily access and even join other countries' SNS, especially if they understand the native languages of the countries. During the data collection process, the author found some comments that were written by people from countries other than Japan and the U.S. Particularly, BMW's Facebook communities had several members from various countries. Some people use their native languages and others use English when they post their comments. Therefore, those comments collected from Facebook might contain small numbers of comments that are not be written by people with individualistic and low context cultures, and there are also possibilities that a small number of comments collected from Mixi were not written by people with collectivistic and high context cultures. At the same time, it raises an interesting question of whether people will adjust their cultural values and change their behaviors in a SNS of a country that has different cultural values with them. Future studies could look into this issue in order to increase our understanding about the influence of cultures on people's SNS usage.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1: Coding Sheet

1. Use of visual oriented information: Indicate whether the comment includes visual oriented information below.

1) – *Photograph*: Photograph means a picture that is made by using a camera.

No / Yes

2) – *Emoticon*: Emoticon means those pictorial symbols forming a record or communication. Example: 😊 :) :-) ☆ ♥

Abbreviations such as “lol” are NOT counted as emoticons.

No / Yes

3) -- *Others type of visual oriented information*:

No / Yes

2. Disclosure of Personal Information: Indicate whether the comment includes comment writer's personal information listed below.

1) – *Gender*

No / Yes

2) – *Age*

No / Yes

3) – *Occupation*

No / Yes

4) – *Information about where he/she lives*

No / Yes

5) – *Family information*

No / Yes

6) – *Other types of personal information*

No / Yes

3. Type of Comments: Indicate the type of the comments by circling one of the numbers below. If a comment contains more than two types of meaning, please choose the most salient one. Here, “related products” mean car parts, such as tires, and goods that are used for assisting the driving, such as GPS navigators.

#### 1. *Asking for advice and information*

The comments that ask for advice and information about the brand's cars, related products, companies that own the brand, and shops that sell the brands' car or provide services related to the brand's car.

#### 2. *Offering advice and information*

The comments that offer advice and information about the brand's cars, related products, the company that owns the brand, and shops that sell the brand's car or provide services related to the brand's cars.

#### 3. *Showing negative feeling about the brands, companies, and shops*

The comments that complain or criticize about the brands, the company that owns the brand, and shops that sell the brand's car or provide services related to the brands' cars.

*4. Showing positive feeling or support for the brands, companies, and shops*

The comments that express positive feeling or support for the brands, the company that owns the brand, and shops that sell the brand's car or provide services related to the brands' cars.

*5. Showing neutral feeling about the brands, companies, and shops*

Telling their thoughts about the brands, the company that owns the brand, and shops that sell the brand's car or provide services related to the brands' cars without showing any positive or negative feeling. The comments that are perceived to contain equal amount of negative and positive opinion should be included here as well. In addition, this type also includes those comments that simply state what kind of car they have.

*6. Advertising something*

*6.1 – Advertising cars or related products*

The comments that tell people he/she wants to sell new and second hand cars of the brand and related products including car parts and goods that could be used in the car.

*6.2 – Put wanted ads of cars from that brand or related products*

The comments that tell people he/she wants to buy the brand's cars or related products through the communities.

*6.3 – Advertising other related online communities or websites*

The comments that ask people to join online communities or visit websites that are related to the brands.

*6.4 – Advertising something unrelated to the brand.*

*6.5 – Others*

*7. Showing opinion to comments wrote by others*

The comments that were written mainly for showing appreciation, criticism, or other types of opinion to comments written by others.

*7.1 – Showing appreciation for the comments written by others.*

*7.2 – Criticizing or complaining about the comments written by others.*

*7.3 – Others*

*8. Others*

*8.1 – Related to the brand*

*8.2 – Unrelated to the brand*