How Cultural Dimensions affect Purchase Intention on Social Commerce

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Abstract:

It is well documented that customers with different cultural backgrounds react differently to the same content on social commerce, but researchers seem to overlook how customers' cultural characteristics impact customer behavior on this emerging channel. This study in progress explores the influence of Hofstede's cultural dimensions on customer behavior, including trust and purchase intention, in social commerce contexts. Based on state-of-the-art literature on the topic, we built a conceptual model to test the relationship between cultural dimensions: high-low power distance and individualism-collectivism, trust, and purchase intention. A preliminary study was conducted to collect data from Instagram users in the Netherlands and Vietnam, measuring their purchase intention towards four different advertising concepts. The initial results of this research support the argument that cultural dimensions play a role in customer behavior on social commerce, and therefore call for more attention towards the influence of cultural dimensions on trust and purchase intention on social commerce environments.

Keywords: *Digital Marketing, Social commerce, Cultural dimensions*

Track: *International Marketing & Marketing in Emerging Countries*

1. Introduction

While German social media users are more likely to prefer data, quotes, and links to beautiful pictures, Japanese users are drawn to video content (Wordbank.com, 2021). While users in the Philippines lead in time spent on social media worldwide thanks to user-generated content and travel content, European users use social media mostly to update on local, national, and international news (Digitalmarketinginstitute.com, 2019). Based on the cultural differences between the East and the West, this study attempts to explain those cultural nuances and propose an innovative approach to help global brands localize their social strategy.

Social commerce is defined as the use of social media to build interpersonal relationships, generate interaction of business information flow, and assist the trade of goods and services through user-generated content and social interaction (Wang & Xie, 2020). ReportLinker (2020) projects that the global social commerce market will reach $604.5 billion by the year 2027, with a growth rate of 31.4% over the 2020-2027 period. The rapid growth of social commerce calls for more research attention regarding angles such as pre-purchase product information sharing, social media technologies, and commercial activities (Liang & Turban, 2011).

The existing literature on social commerce's purchase intention is limited and focuses on trust, information technology, social relations, and perceived value (Wang & Xie, 2020). There is a gap in the analysis of user behavior with cultural difference factor as the key factor, though researchers occasionally mention the culture as an influencing factor of the behavioral intentions of social networking sites users. For example, cultural differences between regions are argued to have a moderating effect on the relationship between social interaction and the intention to purchase from a social commerce site (Ng, 2013). Tang (2017) also points out the moderating effect of culture in the relationship between product-market performance and electronic word-of-mouth for buyers making purchase decisions.

The address of cultural motivation behind customers' purchase intention can play a significant role in the field of consumer behavior theory, supporting brands and social media channels regarding content creation and content distribution to reach their business goals. Therefore, this study in progress tries to answer the question: *"What is the role of cultural dimensions on social commerce behavior?"*. Due to the limited scope of the research, we focus on only two cultural dimensions in Hofstede's (1983) cultural dimensions, which are high-low power distance and individualism-collectivism. We conducted a preliminary study on Instagram users in the Netherlands and Vietnam, since these two countries significantly differ in the two focusing dimensions, to examine customer purchase intention towards different advertising concepts, then discussed the implications of the results.

2. Literature review

2.1 Definition of trust, purchase intention, and cultural dimension on social commerce

In economic situations when rules and customs cannot be used, trust is usually adopted as a reducer of social complexity (Luhmann, 1979). That is why trust is considered as one of the most important factors for e-commerce's success (Constantinides, 2004; Wang & Emurian, 2005). Trust is built also through social interactions with the surrounding environment and other individuals (Lu et al., 2016). While there are two types of trustees on social commerce: the marketplace and the sellers in the marketplace (Lu et al., 2015), this paper focuses on the latter one.

Purchase intention is the predictable future behavior as well as the probability that an action will take place (Engel et al., 1982). The more positive purchase intention is expected, the more likely are individuals to carry out the purchasing action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Culture is the collective programming of the mind, distinguishing the individuals in a group of people from those of another (Hofstede, 1991). Hofstede's national cultural dimensions illustrate how people's cultural preferences differ among different national cultures.

Table 1 shows hitherto studies involving culture, trust, and purchase intention on social commerce.

Papers	Cultural dimensions (IV)	Trust (DV)	Purchase intention (DV)	Contributions/ Benefits
Goodrich & de Mooji, 2013	Yes	Yes	No	The selection of information sources for purchase decisions is heavily impacted by culture.
Hajli, 2015	No	Yes	Yes	Consumers use social commerce constructs to generate content on the internet, positively influencing trust and intention to buy.
Kim & Park, 2013	No	Yes	Yes	Factors affect trust in social commerce. Trust has a positive influence on Purchase intentions and Word-of-Mouth intentions.
Lu et al., 2016	No	Yes	Yes	Social presence factors influence trust, positively affecting online purchase behaviors.
Ng, Celeste See Pui, 2013	Yes	No	Yes	The moderating effect of culture and the mediating role of trust in a social network community and intention to purchase in social commerce environments.
Pookulangara & Koesler, 2011	Yes	No	Yes	A research model using TAM 3 and Hofstede's cultural dimensions to study how culture influences social commerce and users' purchase intention.
Tang, 2017	Yes	No	No	Power distance, individualism, and uncertainty avoidance temper the impact of online word-of-mouth on market share.
Yahia et al., 2018	No	Yes	No	Reputation and price advantage positively impact trust, while social interaction and product differentiation negatively influence trust.
This paper	Yes	Yes	Yes	The effect of cultural dimensions on trust, purchase intention, and their relationship.

Table 1: Studies involving culture, trust, and purchase intention on social commerce

2.2 The impact of cultural dimensions on trust on social commerce

This paper focuses on two dimensions of Hofstede's national cultural dimensions: high-low power distance and individualism-collectivism. Power distance acknowledges the inequality among people in society. This dimension is about how the less powerful people in groups believe and accept that power is unequally distributed (Hofstede, 2001).

Individualism-collectivism is considered by the extent to which interdependence is maintained among a society's members (Hofstede et al., 2001).

Individuals in low power distance cultures actively gather information instead of depending on others, then base their decision more on factual sources (Goodrich & de Mooji, 2013). In contrast, individuals in high power distance cultures seek others' opinions, depending on others' recommendations (Dawar et al, 1996; Pornpitakpan, 2004). This difference in online searching habits suggests a relationship between power distance and trust in social commerce. Because social commerce is mostly about social interaction and relationships between users (Hajli, 2012), in high power distance cultures, the individuals who used to trust people may also trust sellers on social commerce. Low power distance culture individuals, who tend to trust newspapers other than people's review, may not place a similar level of trust in people on social commerce.

Similarly, in individualistic cultures, people prefer using social networking sites to search for information, while in collectivist cultures people use them for ideas and opinion sharing (Goodrich & Mooji, 2013). The bonds among individualistic people are also said to be looser, leading to weaker social interactions among members, then later a weaker influencing impact of referents (Pookulangara & Koesler, 2011). The bonds among collectivistic societies are stronger, therefore individuals tend to be more influenced by others (Pookulangara & Koesler, 2011). This tendency suggests that while individualistic people need different sources of information to trust sellers, collectivist people are more likely to trust sellers on social commerce. Therefore, this research proposed the below hypotheses.

- H1a: High-low power distance has a positive impact on trust.
- H1b: Individualism-collectivism has a negative impact on trust.

2.3 The impact of cultural dimensions on purchase intention on social commerce

Culture could affect not only trust but also purchase intention on social commerce. As people in high power distance cultures prefer personal sources of information and tend to seek others' opinions (Pornpitakpan, 2004), social commerce serves them well in terms of providing others' ideas by its recommendation or review function. On the contrary, low power distance culture people prefer facts and data provided by newspapers (De Mooji, 2011), making social commerce a less attractive buying channel for them. On the other hand, people in collectivistic cultures have more interpersonal communication, leading to more word-of-mouth about a product. This situation benefits social commerce where people are encouraged to communicate and share their opinions. For these reasons, this research proposed hypotheses as below.

- H2a: High-low power distance has a positive impact on purchase intention.
- H2b: Individualism-collectivism has a negative impact on purchase intention.

2.4 The impact of trust on purchase intention on social commerce

Kim & Park (2013) find the correlation between trust and purchase intention, showing that trust positively and significantly influence users' purchase intention on social commerce in Korea. Lu et al. (2016) also reach the same conclusion i.e. that trust in sellers has a significant and positive effect on purchase intention in the context of Chinese social commerce while studying the impact of social presence on trust. This research then hypothesizes a similar idea.

- H3: User trust has a positive impact on purchase intention.

2.5 The impact of cultural dimensions on the relationship between trust and purchase intention on social commerce

Culture influences online word-of-mouth reviews, while word-of-mouth also affects trust in social commerce then later impact purchase intention (Kim & Park, 2012). Tang (2017) shows evidence of the moderating role of national culture in digital word-of-mouth reviews

by multi-cultures research. Individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance temper the effect of electronic word-of-mouth on market share. Shoppers in individualist cultures are found less likely to trust reviews for products from developed countries than shoppers in collectivist cultures, as the former is concerned about biased judgment and that the evaluation cannot truly reflect the actual product (Tang, 2017). Moreover, members of high-power distance societies are also found to be more motivated than people in low-power distance cultures towards products that show negative attitudes or complaints about their high prices (Tang, 2017). It is also explained partly by the fact that consumers' perceived conspicuousness is positively related to status-seeking (Wiedmann et al., 2007). Lastly, people from high uncertainty avoidance cultures take reviews of less popular products more seriously than people from low uncertainty avoidance cultures do (Tang, 2017). The reason is that consumers in high uncertainty avoidance societies are more drawn towards seeking advice or assurance from electronic word-of-mouth to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity (Schumann et al., 2010). Based on provided theory, this research proposes a hypothesis as below.

- H4a: High-low power distance moderates the relationship between trust and purchase intention.
- H4b: Individualism-collectivism moderates the relationship between trust and purchase intention.

2.6 The conceptual model

Figure 1: Conceptual model
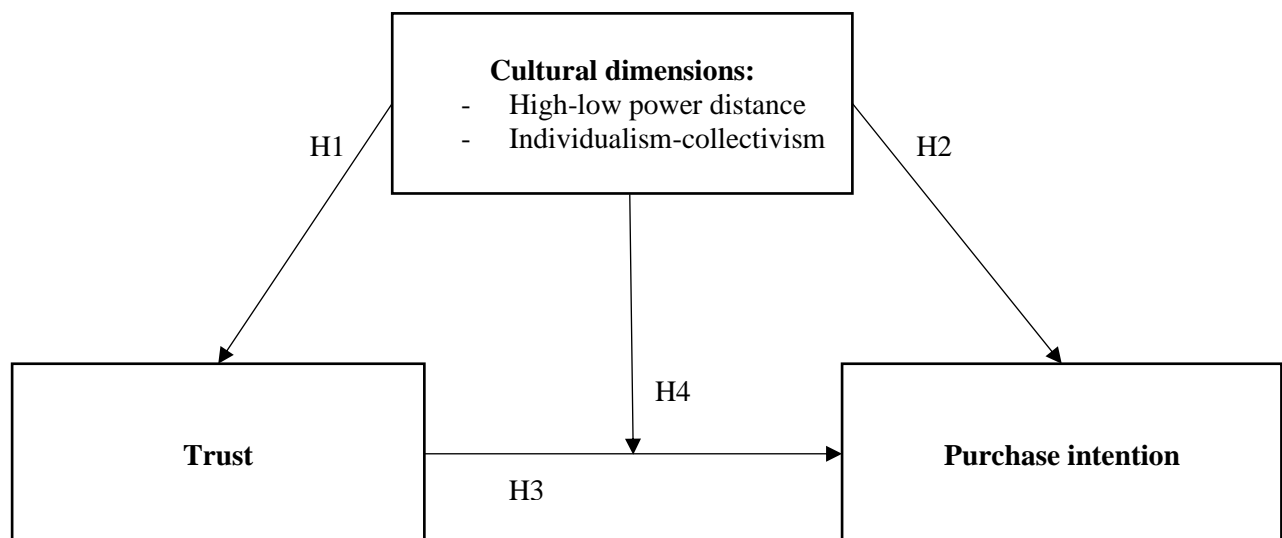
3. Method

3.1 Research design

We used an online survey to collect data from 108 Instagram users in the Netherlands and Vietnam, who use Instagram at least once a week. Each respondent was shown one of four different advertising versions. They answered three to five questions for each variable on a 7-point Likert scale. The questions for each variable were taken from previous studies, including power distance (Yoon, 2009), individualism-collectivism cultural dimension (Yoon, 2009), their trust (Kim & Park, 2013), and purchase intention (Kim & Park, 2013).

3.2 Stimulus content

Nguyen (2014) suggests the relationship among 4 Hofstede's cultural dimensions and 30 different advertising appeals. From that research, we selected four advertising appeals related

to high-low power distance and individualism-collectivism to design four advertising versions. The advertisement content was about suitcases. The suitcases in the four advertisements looked quite similar, and the differences were present in the message and concept of the ads. The four advertising appeals are Cheap, Dear, Freedom, and Family. The stimulus content is shown in Appendix 1.

3.3 Data analysis

The collected data then was analyzed using SPSS. Firstly, a Cronbach's alpha calculation was performed to test the reliability of the data. The Cronbach's alpha showed a reliable result for 10 out of 16 variables under examination. Most of the less reliable variables had Cronbach's alpha of more than 0.5, except for the Power distance in the Freedom dataset which has a relatively low reliability of 0.232.

Later, we used factor analysis to extract components with an Eigenvalue greater than 1 and used the first component with the highest total variance to represent the variable. Overall, most of the extracted factors have a percentage of variance higher than 50%, except for Power distance in the Freedom dataset and Trust in Dear dataset.

Finally, to test the main effects, there were four regression analyses performed in each advertising appeal dataset.

4. Results

Table 2 shows the results of regression analyses in four datasets, and Table 3 are the results of the tested hypotheses by dataset.

Dataset / IV	DV	Trust (H1) b (SE)	PI (H2) b (SE)	PI (H3) b (SE)	PI (H4) b (SE)
Freedom	PD	.361 (.193)	.050 (.208)		-.123 (.194)
	IC	.114 (.193)	.023 (.208)		-.053 (.206)
	Trust			.466 (.181)*	.479 (.189)*
	Interaction PD&Trust				-.326 (.185)
	Interaction IC&Trust				.217 (.200)
Family	PD	.614 (.189)**	.250 (.216)		.184 (.266)
	IC	-.292 (.189)	-.149 (.216)		-.093 (.249)
	Trust			.146 (.181)	.040 (.222)
	Interaction PD&Trust				.132 (.290)
	Interaction IC&Trust				.108 (.265)
Dear	PD	.395 (.226)	.476 (.204)*		.337 (.236)
	IC	-.018 (.226)	-.447 (.204)*		-.418 (.211)
	Trust			.373 (.213)	.288 (.280)
	Interaction PD&Trust				.153 (.236)
	Interaction IC&Trust				-.059 (.284)
Cheap	PD	.524 (.169)**	.338 (.177)		.350 (.247)
	IC	.108 (.169)	.282 (.177)		.252 (.191)
	Trust			.442 (.173)*	.171 (.223)
	Interaction PD&Trust				.023 (.180)
	Interaction IC&Trust				-.238 (.209)

Table 2: Results of regression analyses in four datasets

Hypothesis	Freedom	Family	Dear	Cheap
H1a	-	SUPPORTED	-	SUPPORTED
H1b	-	-	-	-

H2a	-	-	SUPPORTED	-
H2b	-	-	SUPPORTED	-
H3	SUPPORTED	-	-	SUPPORTED
H4a	-	-	-	-
H4b	-	-	-	-

Table 3: Results of the tested hypotheses by dataset

4.1 The impact of cultural dimensions on trust

The influence is found between power distance and trust in Family and Cheap advertising appeals. The result suggests that people in higher power distance cultures tend to trust sellers on social commerce more than people in low power distance do. This result is in agreement with previous research findings that high power distance individuals tend to be more dependent on others' recommendations (Dawar et al, 1996; Pornpitakpan, 2004) so they are also more prone to trust people on social commerce as this is the place where people can share opinions and reviews. However, no correlation relationship is shown between individualism-collectivism and trust in all four datasets, leaving no support for H1b. The reason for the insignificant relation could be partly explained by the limit in the design of the research. The impact is studied only in regards to four advertising appeals which are Freedom, Family, Dear, Cheap. There are 24 more advertising appeals (Albers-Miller & Gelb, 1996), so there is a possibility that the result could be different when taking into account other appeals that are better related to individualism-collectivism.

4.2 The impact of cultural dimensions on purchase intention

The positive and significant correlation between power distance and purchase intention in the Dear appeal means that the higher power distance individuals prefer luxury products that show their status, while lower power distance individuals do not like this kind of message. These results are in line with previous findings of cultural dimensions and advertising appeals, as well as about cultural dimensions and social commerce. While low power distance people prefer factual sources in decision making (Goodrich & de Mooji, 2014), high power distance people search for others' recommendations (Dawar et al, 1996; Pornpitakpan, 2004). Advertising appeals on social commerce looking like personal recommendations could be more attractive to high power distance individuals, while low power distance individuals may not care about the information provided. Low power distance people may look to other objective sources to clarify the information before choosing to believe what is said, leading to the result given. On the other hand, high power distance individuals tend to seek status so it is reasonable for them to prefer an advertisement focusing on luxury and uniqueness.

Another supported result is the correlation between individualism-collectivism and purchase intention in the Dear advertising appeal. The impact of this cultural dimension on purchase intention is significant and negative, meaning that collectivist people are prone to higher purchase intention towards advertisement that shows luxurious characteristics of the product, while individualistic people are not affected by these elements. The result is in line with previous literature stating that individualism people use social media to search for factual information (Goodrich & Mooji, 2013), so emotional benefit advertisement on social commerce cannot be as attractive to them as to collectivist people.

Moreover, insignificant correlation is established in all other regression models testing H2 in the other three advertising appeals. This could be partly explained by the relationship between advertising appeals and cultural dimensions. In previous studies, the relationships between cultural dimensions and advertising appeals are tested by collecting and coding business publications advertisements, while in this study, the relationship is tested by asking respondents questions about their opinions about advertisements on social media. The difference between the two advertising mediums is big, leading to a question of whether it is

still relevant to apply studies of advertising appeals on publication to online generally, or social commerce specifically.

4.3 The impact of trust on purchase intention and the moderating effect of cultural dimensions

The result confirms a positive and significant level in the relationship between trust and purchase intention in Freedom and Cheap advertising appeal datasets. This result is in agreement with previous research of Kim & Park (2013) about this relationship that the more trust users establish with the sellers on social commerce, the more likely they have the intention to purchase. This research, on the other hand, rejects the moderating effect of cultural dimensions on the relationship between trust and purchase intention. Though power distance impacts both trust and purchase intention, no moderating effect is found from power distance to the relationship between these two variables. This result, however, aligns with the research of Yoon (2009) where power distance and individualism-collectivism were found to play no role in the relationship between trust and intention to use on e-commerce.

5. Limitations and future research

The most important limitations of this study: Firstly, this paper is limited by the ability to measure the intention, instead of actual behavior. Secondly, the experimental nature of this research also poses some limitations. As the users are asked to give their evaluation of feelings for an advertisement during a survey, their answers could not be as real as actually seeing the advertisement while using Instagram. Thirdly, the demographic characteristics of respondents are limited by the researchers' network and cannot represent the total Instagram user population, therefore the result could be biased to some extent. Finally, the scope of this research is focusing on two cultural dimensions, four advertising appeals, and is limited to Instagram. To have a comprehensive view of culture's impact on social commerce, it is necessary to design research that includes all cultural dimensions and investigates across different social commerce platforms.

Future research can be designed to improve the real-life experience of the research. For example, researchers can cooperate with businesses to customize different advertising appeals to advertise products then measure real interaction indications as well as real purchases. Another suggestion for future research could be extending the scope to other cultural dimensions, other advertising appeals, and other social commerce platforms such as Facebook, Linked In, Tiktok, etc. As discussed above, the previous studies about the reflection of cultural dimensions on advertising appeals by analyzing advertisement on business publication could be no longer relevant for social media advertising, hence it is interesting to study how the situation can be changed for social commerce.

Practical implications can be drawn for marketers working for local brands or global brands that want to go local on social commerce. It is necessary to include cultural factors when building social strategy, tailored to the cultural characteristics of their customers. It is pointed out clearly in this research that a trustworthy brand can be purchased more on social commerce. So business owners should bear in mind the importance of building trust in their customers by how they express the brand on social media or how they manage online customers' feedback. High-power distance culture people could have higher trust in Instagram. High power distance and Collectivism people may also react more favorably towards Dear advertising appeal that shows luxurious and iconic features of a product. Thus brands are advised to try this type of advertisement if they plan to sell to customers showing these two cultural dimensions.

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Appendix 1

Figure 1 shows four advertising versions in the questionnaire, including the advertising appeal and corresponding cultural dimension.
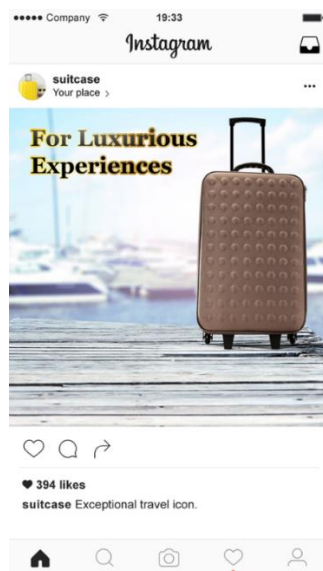
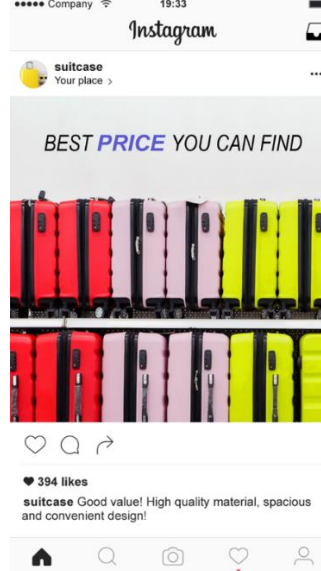Figure 1: Four advertising versions in the questionnaire
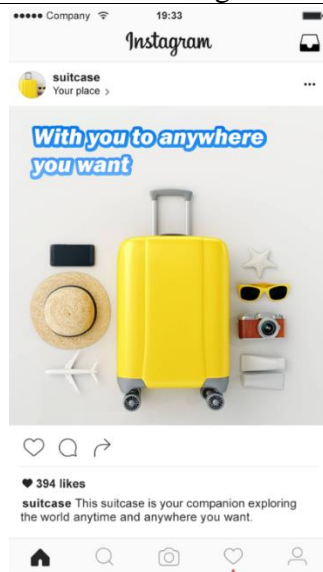
Freedom - Individualism

Family - Collectivism

Dear - High power distance

Cheap - Low power distance