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Cross Cultural Comparative Research of Online Consumer Reviews Intentions

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Abstract: A detailed literature review on motives of knowledge sharing in virtual communities is conducted. Moreover, the comparative study on intentions of consumer reviews between Amazon.com and Amazon.cn, based on an online open-ended survey through content analysis, is done. The analytical results show that users contribute their consumption experiences are mainly depended upon social motives, psychological motives and economic motives, which are deeply correlated and influenced by their national culture dimensions.

Keywords: Hofstede's national culture dimensions, online consumer reviews, review systems, contribution intentions, electronic commerce, cross cultural comparison

1. INTRODUCTION

User-generated online reviews at electronic commerce (e-commerce) websites are a major source of information for online shoppers, and can reduce the risk of uncertainty, and help consumers infer product quality^[1]. It is found that customer reviews often influence consumer online product choices. Additionally, recommendations of other consumers influence the choices of subjects more effectively than recommendations from most specialists^[2]. What is more, online consumer reviews usually take a user perspective and are therefore often viewed as more relevant and reliable than information provided by manufacturers^{[3][4]}. Moreover, online consumer reviews are usually helpful to promote electronic business (e-business) enterprises and e-commerce platforms sales^{[5][6][7][8]}. Meanwhile, consumers may be reluctant to contribute their consumption experiences because of online consumer reviews possessing the characteristics of public goods^[9] and time and efforts consuming. Online consumer reviews are considered as the majority contents of the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). eWOM is recognized as a powerful force, which exerts a great influence on consumers to make decisions, but little is known about why and how users contribute their own online shopping experiences to others who they are unknown. Understanding why or why not online consumers are willing to share their consumption experiences at e-commerce websites is very necessary and important for e-commerce enterprises and platform services providers, especial in cross cultural context. Based on the consideration above, our research questions are as follows.

- Which motives induce consumers to be willing to express their reliable and helpful reviews in an e-commerce website context?

- What are there any key differences among consumers contributing reviews intentions in different national culture backgrounds?

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 draws on previous research to discuss the individual motivations for knowledge sharing in virtual communities (VCs) as well as those dimensions of national culture of Hofstede. The research framework is proposed in section 3 and the research method is presented in section 4.

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We then present results and discussion from the online open-ended survey by content analysis in section 5. Finally, the conclusions are given while future research work is to be done.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

How to efficiently encourage online consumers to issue their useful or pertinent reviews is a major common concern for e-commerce websites. The prior relevant literature on participation intentions mainly focus on knowledge sharing motivation in VCs. To be sure, eWOM communication is considered as VCs knowledge sharing behaviors in our study.

2.1 Motives for knowledge sharing in VCs

Although there is a large volume of academic literature about user knowledge sharing behaviors in VCs, those which focus upon the motives of user knowledge sharing are relatively sparse. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) showed that consumers' desire for social interaction, desire for economic incentives, their concern for other consumers, and the potential to enhance their own self-worth are the primary factors leading to eWOM behaviors^[10]. Wasko et al. (2000) tried to gain greater understanding of why people contribute to the provision of knowledge as a public good in electronic communities of practice, and the research indicated that people participation are primarily out of community interest, generalized reciprocity and prosocial behavior^[11]. Kankanhalli et al. (2005) revealed that knowledge self-efficacy and enjoyment in helping others significantly impact electronic knowledge repositories (EKR) usage by knowledge contributors^[12]. However, some motives have been found to the contributions are often influenced by the online context^[13]. Motivations studied in prior literature on VCs knowledge contribution are summarized in Table 1. After that, we sort out fifteen motivations about VCs knowledge sharing and divide them into four categories: social motives, psychological motives, technological factors and economic motives. Social motives include enjoy helping others, reputation or image and social intercourse. Psychological motives contain reciprocity, self-expression feelings, fun and enjoyment, sense of identification, ego-enhancement, sense of self-efficacy and habits. Easy to use and usefulness are summarized into technological factors. And economic motives include tangible rewards, time spending/effort and career motive.

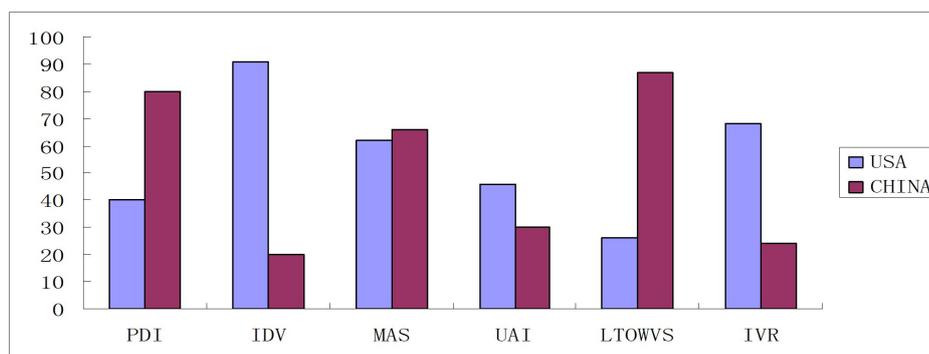
Table 1. Motives studied in prior literature on VCs knowledge contribution

Categories	Description	Literature
Social Motives		
Enjoy helping others	A genuine desire to help others make a better purchase decision without anticipating any reward in return	[9],[10],[11],[12] [13],[14],[15]
Reputation/Image	To get social rewards such as approval, status and respect through knowledge contribution	[9],[11],[12],[14] [15],[16],[17],[18]
Social Intercourse	To meet like-minded people and communicate with various people sharing similar interests	[10], [13],[17],[19]
Psychological Motives		
Reciprocity	The belief that current contribution to VCs would lead to future request for knowledge being met	[9],[11],[12] [14],[15],[17]
Self-expression feelings	Express one's complaint or satisfaction feelings in order to reduction expectation disconfirmation	[10],[20]
Fun and Enjoyment	Contribution in VCs is pleasurable fun and playful	[16],[21]
Sense of Identification	The perception of similarity of values, membership, and loyalty with VCs	[9],[10],[12] [17],[18]
Ego-enhancement	Writing reviews lets me sharpen and clarify my thoughts about the subjects on which I write	[13]
Sense of Self-efficacy	The confidence in one's ability to provide knowledge that is valuable to VCs	[9],[12],[15],[18]
Habits	Fit with daily routine	[13],[15]
Technological Motives		
Ease of Use	The degree to which a person believes that using a system would be free of effort	[22],[23]
Usefulness	Improve performance	[15]
Economic Motives		
Tangible Rewards	Receive a reward for the writing	[10],[12],[14],[15]
Time Spending/Effort	The time and effort required to codify and input knowledge into VCs	[12],[15]
Career Motive	Enhancing one's resume by demonstrating one's expertise in writing reviews in a given domain	[13]

Whether and especially how these fifteen motivations above stimulate consumers to contribute their own consumption experiences in e-commerce websites are still unknown. In addition, whether different cultural backgrounds consumers' motives engaging in consumption comments exist in difference is also unclear.

2.2 National culture difference

It is demonstrated that consumers' online review behaviors are relative to cultural factors^[1,24]. The most influential culture theory in the field of social science is the Hofstede's national culture dimensions^[24]. Cultural differences can be defined as the differences among the values of country customs, moral values, norms, attitudes and other aspects at different national, ethnic, racial and religious beliefs^[25]. Hofstede's national culture include six dimensions: power distance (PD), masculinity versus femininity, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance (UA), long term orientation (LTO) and indulgence versus restraint (IVR)^[25]. As the big differences between Chinese and American culture, we select China and United States as our research sample. The national culture dimensions index scores of China and USA are shown in Figures 1. The index scores represent relative positions of countries. There are significant differences in power distance, individualism versus collectivism, long term orientation and indulgence versus restraint between China and USA. Based on this, we focus on those four dimensions of national culture in order to understand consumers' review intentions whether or not are influenced by national culture factors.



Data source: according to the literature [25] data processed. PDI refers to power distance index, IDV refers to individualism index, MAS refers to masculinity index, UAI refers to uncertainty avoidance index, LTOWVS refers to long term orientation index based on World Values Survey, and IVR refers to Indulgence Versus Restraint Index.

Figure 1. Cultural index scores of China and United States

3. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Research on consumer online reviews intentions on e-commerce websites based on cross cultural context becomes a novel and emergent topic. Our review of the literature about VCs knowledge sharing motivations has derived that fifteen distinctive motives may be in engaging in consumption experiences communication on e-commerce websites. Based on literature review, we put forward a research framework shown in Figure 2, where four categories of behavior motives are thought as main factors which encourage online consumers to contribute their consumption experiences at e-commerce websites, while Hofstede's cultural dimensions moderating users' behavioral motives. The categories of behavior motives include social motives, psychological motives, technological motives and economic motives. Next, we will examine the research framework through a content analysis.

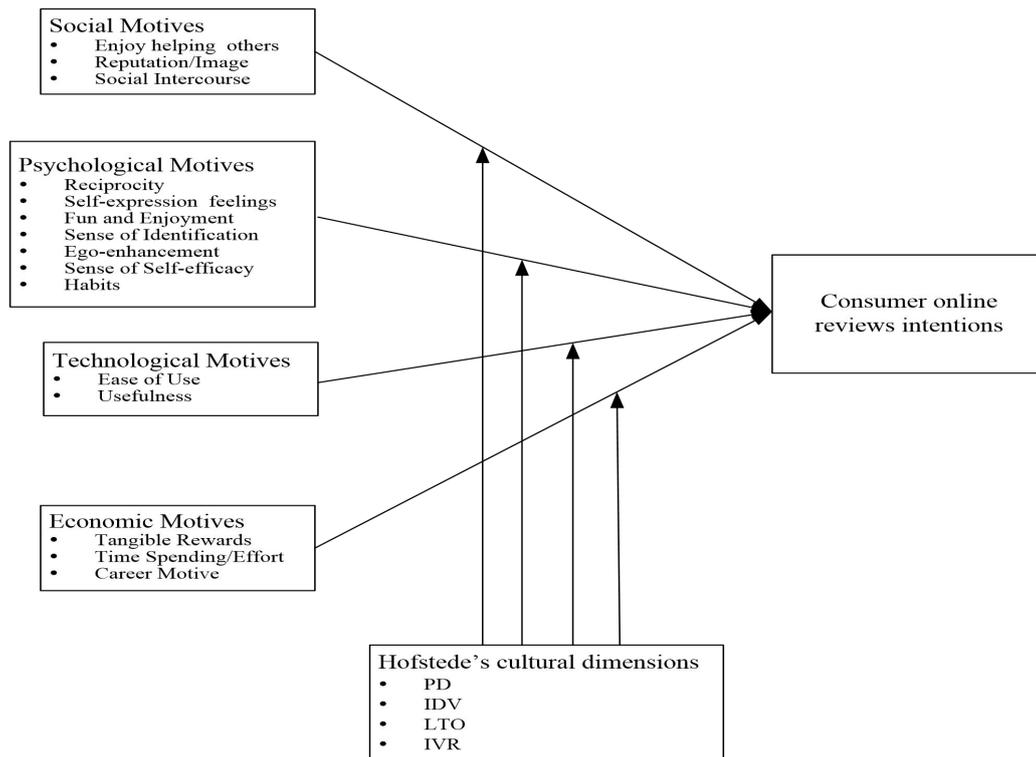


Figure 2. Research framework

4. RESEARCH METHOD

4.1 Data collection

In order to examine if there are those four categories of motives and cultural differences in consumer online reviews between China and USA, an open-ended online survey with the following questions according to the users of Amazon.com and Amazon.cn was performed.

- Will you share your consumption experiences about online shopping at Amazon.com (survey for American users) or Amazon.cn (survey for Chinese consumers)?
- Why or why not?

We selected Amazon of America and China specially, because Amazon almost has the same consumer review systems except language difference between China and USA. Furthermore, Amazon.com is one of the most popular products reviews websites and an outstanding exemplar of user-generated content.

4.2 Data analysis

In order to make an exploratory study of a qualitative and interpretative nature, we used the content analysis of the qualitative method. It helps to better understand the factors which are associated with consumer reviews intentions in e-commerce review systems. Firstly, we tried out coding categories to find whether there were the same motives like literature review through extracting the survey data from the respondents. Then the data were aggregated into categories. The percentage of response in each category was counted and listed finally. Table 2 provides a description of our results including a listing of categories, the percentage of responses in each category, and some typical samples.

Table 2. Results of content analysis and sample comments

Categories	Chinese users	American users	Samples
	percentage	percentage	
Enjoy helping others	43	36	I feel I'm helping readers find great books; My goal is to help others to be educated and informed to help in the decision-making process.
Self-expression feelings	34	5	I like to talk about what products and services I use at Amazon.
Reciprocity	11	7	I've benefited from reading others' reviews and am giving back by sharing my own experiences.
Economic rewards	5	0	If there are corresponding incentive policies, I will post my reviews.
Social intercourse	3	6	I post my reviews at Amazon to meet new people with an interest in cooking, psychology, spirituality, etc. It is a great place for people with similar interests to meet. I have met some great minds at Amazon.
Sense of identification	2	5	I love Amazon communities and I am used to shopping at Amazon.
Fun and enjoyment	2	34	When reviewing I feel I'm providing a service to consumers that is spiritually rewarding. Reviewing literally makes me happy on a daily basis. Amazon reviewing has been a fun experience. When It ceases to be fun, I'll be gone.
Self improvement	0	4	By writing reviews, I could appreciate the goods more deeply the characteristics.
Sense of self-efficacy	0	2	I feel my comments are helpless to improve the product quality.
Habits	0	1	I am used to comments after e-shopping. I am unused to product reviews for forgetting about it.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We received open-ended responses from 155 participants of Amazon.cn and 70 respondents of 1000 top reviewer ranking of Amazon.com users. All participants are worthy of trust to have e-commerce websites experiences. Most of them announced that they usually share their consumption experiences at Amazon while only less than 20 percent of respondents reported that they did not share reviews at Amazon. Additionally, those unwilling to share product reviews are all users of Amazon.cn who owe to no posting habits, time-spending and effort needed. We began the content analysis by categorizing comments into four general categories according to previous literature review's resulting. As shown in Table 2, we only find three categories motives including social motives which is 46 percent in China while that of USA is 42 percent, psychological motives which is 49 percent in China while that of USA is 58 percent, and economic motives which is only 5 percent in China while American are not care of economic rewards in our sample. We did not find the factors of technology according to our research in both two countries.

5.1 Social motives

As shown in Table 2, the users of Amazon.cn sharing their reviews are slightly higher than those of Amazon.com, which shows that social motives with enjoying helping others and social intercourse make a subtle difference. The reputation/image motive cannot be found in our sample. The percentage of enjoying helping others motive is relatively closer between both countries, which accounts for a higher proportion in all coded motives. The result may be interpreted as the same sign of the Hofstede's cultural dimension of femininity in China and USA. Meanwhile we also find that the percentage of social intercourse motive is relatively low in both countries, and the proportion of USA is slightly higher than China. This may be due to the

different social intercourse habits of both countries' users. It has been social function earlier at Amazon.com than that of Amazon.cn. In addition, Chinese online consumers have not still the habits of social intercourse at e-commerce websites.

5.2 Psychological motives

As shown in Table 2, the users of Amazon.cn sharing their reviews are lower than those of Amazon.com, which comes from psychological motives including self-expression feelings, reciprocity, sense of identification, fun and enjoyment, self improvement, sense of self-efficacy and habits. The motive of self-expression feelings which accounts for 34 percent in China includes users' expressing their satisfaction and complaints. Users are often willing to reduce their cognitive dissonance through articulating their different feelings. While USA users are lower than China comparatively in the percentage of reciprocity motive. This may be inferred that China is a country of collectivism with more reciprocity incline among members. It is found that the motive of fun and enjoyment which users of USA account for 34 percent while that of China is only 2 percent has the significant difference between two countries. The result may be interpreted that users of USA have the stronger individualism than that of China. Additionally, Chinese users have the higher scores in the dimensions of Hofstede's national culture in PDI, LTO and restraint index (see Figure 1) than those of USA. Those lead to users of China not to articulate their truly thought freely and enjoyment. Users of United Staes are on the contrary. A representative example about the psychological motives of users at Amazon.com is shown in Figure 3.

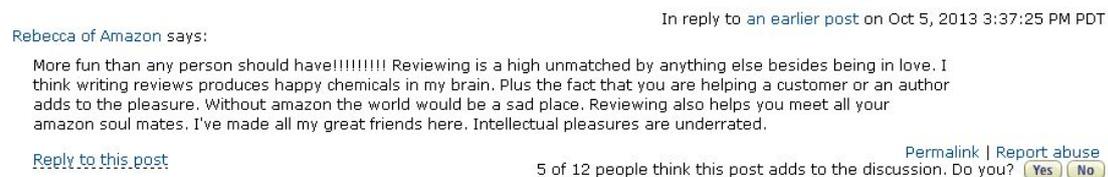


Figure 3. An example

5.3 Economic motives

As shown in Table 2, only 5 percent users of China focus on the economic incentives while no American concerning it in our survey. It might be related to the degree of economic development in two countries^[25].

It is worth mentioning that the motive of career is not detected in our survey, but there really were the means of convenient finding jobs by posting their reviews and introduction their interests at Amazon.com.

To be sure, the economic motive of time spending/effort is an important barrier factor for engaging in consumption reviews at e-commerce websites in both countries. It still needs to make consumer review systems more convenient and easier to use.

6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article is to better understand the motivations about a consumer contributing reviews at e-commerce websites and the intentions whether and how have influence from different national cultures. We begin with a review of the literature on user motives for engaging in knowledge sharing in VCs. Based on literature research, we identify 15 potential motives for customers' online knowledge sharing, which are concluded into 4 categories: social, psychological, economic and technical motives. Then deep comparison among the motives of users' contribution their consumption experiences at Amazon.com and Amazon.cn is conducted by using content analysis through an open-ended survey from the perspective of Hofstede's national culture dimensions.

From the results of content analysis, we explored 10 motives of consumer reviews at Amazon and summarized them into 3 categories including social motives, psychological motives and economic motives, which may be given some implications for e-commerce platforms services providers and websites enterprises. First, the consumer online review system's design must consider users' experiences and motives from social, psychological and economic perspective, especially social motives, while not further considering technological motives probably. Second, the factor of national culture must also be considered for global e-commerce websites when providing online consumer reviews system, and so on.

Although the article explored some intentions of consumer reviews on e-commerce websites, it is inevitable that there are some limitations, such as only intentions of contributing reviews by qualitative analysis are explored. To better understand consumer online reviews motives at e-commerce sites, it is necessary to conduct quantitative study in the future, especially the moderating effect of national culture.

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