Cross-Cultural Comparison of Adolescents' Online Self-Presentation Strategies:: Turkey and the United States

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Cross-Cultural Comparison of Adolescents' Online Self-Presentation Strategies:
Turkey and the United States

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ABSTRACT

Studying how social network site (SNS) users from different countries present themselves is crucial for inquiring into the dynamics of culture and youth. This study of 100 adolescents age 14-18 (M_{age}= 15.90, SD = .1.48) was designed to determine whether cultural differences between adolescents in the U.S. and Turkey would manifest themselves in their online self-presentation strategies on Facebook. Snowball sampling was used to reach U.S. and Turkish adolescents (50 participants from each country) who were using Facebook. The study provides novel insights into how adolescents from each country, in relation to its specific cultural framework, display certain kinds of self-presentation strategies. By coding Facebook profiles of adolescents, the authors found that the sharpest cross-cultural contrast was found in the frequency of the self-promotion strategy, which was more frequent in the United States. There was also a significant difference in use of exemplification strategy between the two countries; it was more widely used in Turkey. The high level of the ingratiation strategy in both countries may reflect the importance of "likes" in the Internet culture. There was also a significant cross-national difference in the ingratiation strategy, which U.S. teens used more. Finally, the authors also found a low level of use of the intimidation and supplication strategies in both countries. The study highlights the importance of self-exploration in constructing identities that conform to desirable cultural roles.

KEYWORDS

Adolescents, Cultural Differences, Self-Presentation Strategies, Social Networking Sites

INTRODUCTION

The use of new media for information exchange, self-expression, and connection is highly prevalent among youth around the world (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, et al., 2010; Pew Research Internet Project, 2014; Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2010), with online social media sites continuing to grow in popularity (Duggan & Smith, 2013; Lenhart et al., 2015). In the United States, the number one social network for teens, ages 13-17, is Facebook, with 71 percent reporting its use. Alongside the United States, Turkey ranks in the top five countries with the highest percentage of Facebook users (Gezgin, 2013).

In the last four decades, Turkey transitioned from a primarily agricultural, collectivistic country to one which is more industrialized; as such, valued identity markers may be shifting, both offline and on.

According to Erikson (1963), an important task of adolescence is to explore and develop stable identities. Extant research has found that online spaces seem to be a new social context where adolescents address developmental issues such as identity development and self-presentation (Greenfield & Subrahmanyam, 2003; Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, & Tynes, 2004; Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011; Uhls, 2015). In addition, cultural norms may emerge online and present themselves on social media profiles, shaping adolescents' use of self-presentation strategies. Understanding how social network site (SNS) users from different countries present themselves is important for exploring the dynamics of culture and youth.

This study was designed to determine whether cultural differences between adolescents in two countries, the United States and Turkey, would manifest themselves in their online self-presentation strategies on Facebook.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

We turn to Goffman's dramaturgy theory (1959) as the lens through which to examine online self-presentation. Self-presentation can be defined as a process through which individuals transmit their image to others (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Leary 1996; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Goffman argues that the primary motivation in self-presentation is to present an idealized image of self that conforms to cultural expectations. Just as an actor's desire for a standing ovation motivates him/her to perform according to the audience's feedback, ordinary individuals too, are eager to present a certain identity and presentation based on the feedback they get from others in their society. This is why Goffman argues that an individual's most important desire is to successfully present the ideal role they think is fit for them in their society (Goffman, 1959).

In order to create the desired impression for an audience, individuals need to strategically control the information that they disclose (Leary 1996; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). In other words, self-presentation provides a link between the self and others; it represents how they view themselves and how they want to be viewed by others (Baumeister, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). In general, people engage in self-presentation in order to obtain social and material benefits, such as identity validation, power, friendship, or financial benefits (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Leary 1996; Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

ONLINE NETWORKS, ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL VALUES

Social networking sites serve as opportunities for identity exploration and self-presentation through the moderation of the information on users' profiles (Stutzman, Capra, & Thompson, 2011; Tufekci, 2008). Notably, teens construct their public personas by formatting the information on their profiles (Manago et al., 2008; Madden et al., 2013). Adolescents may use various Facebook affordances for self-presentation in the process of identity development. For example, adolescents' construction of a Facebook profile (e.g., the type and amount of self-information they disclose about themselves) and the changes they make to these profiles on a daily basis (e.g., edits, posting pictures, posting comments) can be considered acts of self-presentation.

The offline context has implications for online experiences (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011). Teens can also use online social networking sites to gather cultural information and express real and idealized selves within the context of their environment (Rainie, Lenhart & Smith, 2012; Manago, Graham, Greenfield, et al., 2008; Michikyan, Dennis, & Subrahmanyam, 2014; Salimkhan, Manago, & Greenfield, 2010; Subrahmanyam et al., 2006; Uhls, 2015). Cultural identity and audience characteristics are two crucial factors that shape the presentation of idealized values (Hofstede, 1980; Maltz & Borker, 1982).

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