Intercultural communications related phenomena on Facebook

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Abstract

This is a preliminary study to investigate intercultural communications related phenomena on Facebook, conducted by focusing on the behaviors of Facebook users. In particular, the behaviors exhibited by Filipino and Japanese undergraduate students when using Facebook were investigated. These Filipino students and Japanese students interacted face to face in classes at the Technical University of the Philippines for three days as one of the activities done during the study tour. After the face to face meeting, they had a chance to continue their friendship through Facebook.

The research was twofold: the first phase was conducted by one of the author's seminar students, Ms. Kei Murakami as her graduation thesis, and the second was conducted by the author. The Facebook contents of 11 Filipino students and 13 Japanese students were analyzed mainly in terms of posting and tagging, and two Japanese students were interviewed thoroughly. Based on the results, the specific usages of Facebook by Filipino students and Japanese students were revealed and discussed in the terms of "pictures posted," "functions of Timeline," and "number of Facebook friends." In conclusion, the phenomena of intercultural communication was proposed for further future study using the value orientation developed by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961).

Keywords: Facebook, The Philippines, Intercultural communication, phenomena

1. Introduction

Communicative styles and behaviors vary across cultures due to different cultural values and attitudes. For example, the communicative styles of individualistic cultures and collectivist cultures are different. In general, people of individualistic cultures prefer low-context messages and direct communication, whereas people from collectivist cultures prefer high-context messags and indirect communications.Therefore, the former case, people can easily negotiate and develop relationships during conversations, whereas in the latter case, people need to know the relationships among the speakers before initiating their conversations. Some research support the view that online cultures

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reflect the behavior of offline cultures. However, when English is the dominant language in the online culture, further investigation is necessary.

There is a scarcity of research that focuses on the process of the intercultural communications, aside from cross-cultural comparisons of the users of each nation-based, social networking service. Therefore, in this study, I will conduct an exploratory investigation of intercultural communications related phenomena on Facebook by focusing on user behaviors.

2. Literature Review

Facebook was created in 2004 by a small group of students and was released worldwide in 2006. In Japan, it became popular in January 2011 because of the founding of the Japanese Facebook Office in 2010. According to the survey conducted by eBizMBA in May 2016, the top five social networking sites are the following: 1) Facebook, 2) YouTube, 3) Twitter, 4) LinkedIn, 5) Pinterest, and 6) Google+. Thus, we can see the popularity of Facebook among SNS users. Table 1 shows the total number of Facebook users in January 2015. In the U.S., more than half of the population are Facebook users while in Japan, only 17% of the population are Facebook users. Because the population differs among the countries, the rank in Table 1 is determined by the total number of Facebook users, and this rank differs from the order of the ratio. Thus, we need to be careful to compare the number of Facebook users and the ratio depending on the theme of the study.

In addition, the percentage of Internet users in the Philippines and Japan in 2016 was 43.5% and 91.1%, respectively, while the percentage of Facebook users in the Philippines and Japan in 2015 was 33.97% and 17.44%, respectively. This shows that the users of the Internet and the users of Facebook do not necessarily correlate, and thus there is unique usage of Facebook in each country.

Table 1. Facebook Users by Country as of January 2015

Rank by number of users	Country	Number of users	FB users/population ratio
1	U.S.A.	176,000,000	55.17%
2	India	102,000,000	8.05%
3	Brazil	84,000,000	41.58%
4	Indonesia	56,000,000	22.15%
5	Mexico	48,000,000	38.77%
6	The Philippines	34,000,000	33.97%
6	Turkey	34,000,000	44.83%
13	Japan	22,000,000	17.44%
13	Vietnam	22,000,000	24.40%
13	Argentine	22,000,000	52.63%

(AUN Consulting Inc., 2015)

In the Philippines, the Facebook founder and chief executive officer announced the launch of an app that offers free mobile Internet services (according to Philstar[1] Global) on March 20, 2015. One of the telecommunications companies that partnered with Facebook to introduce the Internet.org app would give free Internet access to 24 mobile sites in the fields of education, health, jobs, communication, information, and news. Thus, the subscribers may also use the services of Facebook and Facebook Messenger through the app free of charge. The Internet.org app has been already introduced in six countries: Colombia, Ghana, Tanzania, Kenya, India, and Zambia. The Philippines is the seventh country in which the app was introduced, and it is the first country in the Southeast Asia Region. Therefore, it is easy to guess that access to Facebook will be more from a mobile browser rather than from a Facebook web browser in the Philippines.

On the other hand, in Japan, among SNS, LINE is very popular. A survey of 2,000 Japanese people who used SNSs in 2015, conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, found that those people use a variety of SNSs as shown in Figure 1. The results of using Facebook, Twitter, and LINE are 35.3%, 31.0%, and 37.5%, respectively.
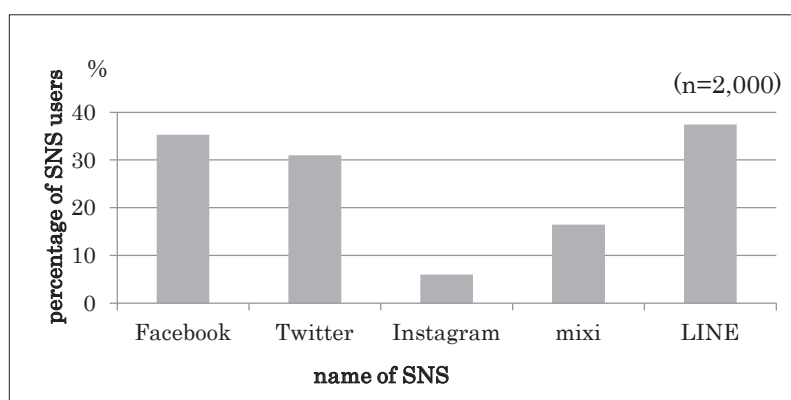
Figure.1. Percentage of SNS users in 2015
(Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2015)

This means that although Facebook is well known and can be used in about 100 different languages, the motivation and the current situation with regard to Facebook use seems quite different.

One of the reasons why not many Japanese use Facebook is the requirement of using one's own name. Ishii (2013) conducted a comparative cultural study on SNS use by focusing on motivation and self-disclosures, and found that the level of self-disclosure of Japanese is lowest, and the number of friends is the least among the U.S.A., Taiwan, China, and Japan. Thus, there are characteristics of

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1) Philstar.com is the online presence of the STAR Group of Publications, a leading publisher of newspapers and magazines in the Philippines.

Japanese behaviors that are unique with regard to the use of Facebook.

Regarding the cross-cultural comparison of Facebook use, Cho (2010) conducted a study of the communicative behaviors of SNS users from Korea and the United States in terms of high-and low-context culture as well as individualism-collectivism culture and revealed that SNS relationship patterns replicate face-to face relationship patterns while reflecting users' cultural orientation, but this comparison was nation-based.

Capua (2012) reviewed more than one hundred studies published in the past five years beginning in 2012 that focused on motivations with regard to Facebook use. Six different categories were identified: initiating and maintaining relationships, learning about others, recognition, personality and willingness to communicate, social influence, and experience. Among these findings, there are several cross-cultural studies by scholars such as Jackson & Wang (2013); Won, Shin, Joo & Park (2014); and Rui & Wang (2015). However, most of the cross-cultural studies were conducted at the national level or on a pre-existing scale, such as Hofstede's four dimensions or Hall's low and high-context cultures.

Therefore, in my study, I would like to start my exploratory investigation on the individual Facebook user's behavior in terms of intercultural communication in order to understand the real phenomena found on Facebook sites.

3. Two Phases of Research

This is the preliminary study to investigate individual Facebook user's behavior in terms of intercultural communication, so the research is twofold. The first phase was conducted by one of my students, Ms. Kei Murakami, for her graduation thesis. She conducted her research in relation to the concept of self-disclosure in 2015. However, in this paper I will report the part of the data used in her thesis in order to show behavior related to using Facebook by Filipino students and Japanese students. The second phase of the research was conducted by the author. The interviews were conducted with two Japanese students in order to find out how they use Facebook daily. In my seminar, a study tour is held in the Philippines every year, and the data reported here is related to the study tour that was held in the Philippines from August 30 to September 12, 2014.

3.1. Research Phase One
3.1.1. Methods

The study tour was held from August 30 to September 12, 2014; however, the period of this research was August 30 to September 23 because the exchange between Japanese students and Filipino students was expected to continue for a while after the tour. In addition, some Japanese students continued their tour after the final day of the study tour. The subjects of this research were 13 Japanese seminar

students (7 male, 6 female) and 11 Filipino students (5 male, 6 female) at the Technological University of the Philippines (TUP). Although the Japanese students met many Filipino students in several classes at the TUP, these 11 students were selected because they are the persons who socialized with Japanese students while the Japanese students stayed in the TUP Guest House for three days. Data was collected from these subjects and analyzed through content analysis.

3.1.2. Results

Table 2 shows the number of postings. There are four types: (1) posted themselves; (2) Japanese students were tagged to the Filipino postings; (3) Japanese students were tagged to the Japanese postings; (4) the content of the posting was not related to the study tour. The total number of postings by Japanese students is larger than the total number of postings by the Filipino students; however, 63% were tagged by the Filipino students. In addition, among the Filipino subjects, tagging by the Filipinos was 13%, which is more often than tagging by the Japanese students at 5%. From these results, it can be said that tagging is quite popular among Filipino students compared to the Japanese students. According to the Facebook help center, "When you tag someone, that content (ex: photo, post) may be shared with the person tagged and their friends." This means the content will be easily distributed among not only your own friends, but also the friends of the person tagged. According to Murakami (2016), the Filipino students tend to tag whenever they post a picture. Thus, the Japanese students were bewildered by the Filipino students' tagging behavior since they registered with their real names on Facebook and were concerned about it. On the other hand, the Filipino students thought that using their real names is convenient for finding a friend and being able to start communication. In the posts, the Filipinos often use personal words such as "Hey! ○○！" "△△！ Arigato!," although the post is open to many Facebook friends. Japanese students, instead, write personal words when they report some events such as "I went the restaurant with ○○ and △△." Japanese students believe Facebook is open to the public, so if s/he needs to send some personal messages to a certain friend, then s/he believes that LINE or some other SNS is more appropriate.

In addition, 60% of the total number of postings by the Filipino students were classified as unrelated postings in Table 2. What they posted was their way of sharing information. It is very common for Filipino students to share some information among Facebook friends.

Table 2. The number of the postings

Nationality	(1) Number of self-postings		(2) Tagging by Filipino		(3) Tagging by Japanese		(4) Unrelated postings		Total number of postings	
Japanese	48	16%	187	63%	47	16%	16	5%	298	100%
Filipino	42	22%	25	13%	10	5%	116	60%	193	100%

Table 3 shows the content of the postings, classified into four categories. The four categories are (1) only pictures, (2) pictures with a sentence, (3) sharing about the study tour, and (4) others. For Japanese students, besides posting pictures with a sentence, 29% of the total number of posting were sharing the information about their study tour. For the Filipino students, 26% were posting a picture and 69% were posting pictures with a sentence. That means that 95% of the postings by Filipinos were pictures. Thus, it can be said that the Filipino students like to post pictures more than the Japanese students.

Table 3. The contents of the postings

Nationality	(1) Only pictures		(2) Pictures with a sentence		(3) Sharing		(4) Others		Total number of postings	
Japanese	15	31%	17	35%	14	29%	2	4%	48	100%
Filipino	11	26%	29	69%	2	5%	0	0%	42	100%

As I mentioned earlier, Filipino students can use Facebook free of charge if they have smart phones and use one specific telecommunication system. For Japanese students, connecting to the Internet was not easy since free Wi-Fi is limited and the speed is very slow at the University where we stayed in the Philippines. Thus, it is not so meaningful to compare the number of postings statistically; however, we can tell the tendencies of the Japanese and Filipino students' behaviors towards using Facebook.

3.2. Research Phase Two

3.2.1. Methods

Two students who visited the Philippines under the seminar study tour described above were selected for the interview. Since they interacted with the students at the several universities in the Philippines, it was assumed that they will maintain their relationship on Facebook. The length of each interview was about 50 to 60 minutes.

In addition, regarding the survey of their usage of Facebook, another key element of intercultural communication is language. How do students switch their language when they communicate in their second language? Filipino students use English and Tagalog daily and they study Japanese in class, while Japanese students use Japanese and English daily in the Philippines. Thus, Filipino students and Japanese students can interact in English or in Japanese. Therefore, the language used is another aspect of the research.

3.2.2. Results

Table 4 shows the basic information about student A and student B. Both are 4th year undergraduate students. Student A went to the Philippines twice in September 2014 and February 2015, while student B went to the Philippines in September 2014.

Table 4. Summary of the profiles of two students

	Student A	Students B
Start at the year of	freshman	sophomore
Total number of friends	1100	900
Japanese vs International friends (55 countries) ratio	60% vs 40%	30% vs 70%
Frequency	Several times in a day	Once in a week
Family	Not included	Not included
Private vs Public	Private	Private
SNS used beside Facebook	LINE, Twitter, Instagram	LINE, Twitter

Case 1: Student A

Student A is interested in media and wants to become a movie director. Therefore, his interest is very wide and he has a social network of a variety of people and groups. For example, he held an LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) symposium at TUP with the help of other seminar members during our study tour. For him, Facebook is a good place to develop linkages and maintain relationships with his old and new friends. He selected issues and articles and posted them on the Facebook. When an article was written in English or the issues were more relevant to English speaking friends such as issues pertaining to the laws on same-sex marriage in the U.S.A., he wrote his comments in English first and Japanese in order to let Japanese friends to know about the issues. If the contents were more relevant for Japanese friends, then he wrote in Japanese only. He believes that movies can be understood without any language, so he shares movies with English comments.

Besides sharing articles, he also posts when he leaves Japan in order to let his friends know where he is going. While he was in the Philippines in February, he posted seven times (once a day) in one week in the Philippines.

By using Facebook messenger, he spent two hours with a Filipino friend. He exchanged 20 to 30 messages with his friend.

He wants to obtain as many Facebook "likes" as possible for his contents posted on his Facebook wall. Occasionally, he checks his own wall and checks all of his posts and erases the posts that do not get more than three "likes" because he feels ashamed. By erasing the unimportant posts, he is creating his own wall with his own tastes. He is satisfied if he can get more than 60 "likes" on Facebook.

Case 2: Student B

Student B is an active student who has been to Shanghai for an internship at a company, to Pusan for facilitating Korean high school students at AESEP, to Cambodia for managing a student project, and to South Africa in August 2015 as a short-term student volunteer. Besides these activities, he is one of the staff members who resides and works at the International House (the dormitory that belongs to

the university. There are about 25 Japanese and 95 international students living there).

For him, Facebook is the place to post information about major events to his friends such as going to South Africa. He reads his friends' posts more often than he uploads his own posts. Although he does not post on Facebook often, when he posts, he writes long comments with a personal computer. He often "likes" new posts.

He belongs to 15 to 20 groups, and four of them are groups of International House members at a different time. The number of International House group members is about 100, and the ratio of Japanese and international students is 25 and 75, respectively. The international students are from about 15 countries.

Since Chinese students cannot use Facebook, he also uses LINE. Because of its convenience, he has a group of 80 members in LINE in order to send a short message to international students in the house. He can find comments four, five, six, or seven times in this International House group on Facebook. He posts some important notices such as the season of dangerous insects, being aware of molester in the park, and so forth. He writes in Japanese first and in English second. Since international students are interested in Japanese and Japanese culture, they try to write in Japanese as much as possible. Thus, he also tries to write in Japanese first. However, he knows that at the beginning of a new semester, the Japanese language abilities of some international students are not high enough to understand the contents, so he also writes in English. In the case of emergencies or important issues such as going to a hospital, opening a bank account, and so on, he writes in English only.

4. Discussion

4.1. Pictures Posted

Regarding the kinds of pictures posted, there are some differences between the Japanese and the Filipinos. The Filipino students tend to take a lot of pictures of themselves with a different Japanese friend whenever Japanese students meet them. Instead of taking a group picture, Filipino students like to take many pictures of two people and post them on Facebook. Since the profile pictures of the Filipinos tend to be very formal and in uniform, the pictures with Japanese friends show very casual looks on their faces. Thus, they easily attract notice on Facebook. According to student A, the picture of two people posted by Filipino students and tagged by them sometimes causes a misunderstanding among student A's Facebook friends since it looks as if they are very close friends. Thus, the custom of taking a picture of two people side-by-side and tagging it seems to become a cause of misunderstanding for certain people. Especially, tagging is a bit problematic since the Filipino students like tagging. The Japanese students have to receive many pictures if they are not aware of the function

of Facebook.

On the other hand, many Filipino students also post family pictures since they include their families in their Facebook friends. However, Japanese students do not include their families in their Facebook friends, and they believe Facebook is very personal space.

4.2. Timeline

The timeline is the space on the profile where the students can see their own posts, posts from friends, and stories that are tagged. The posts are organized by the date they were posted. However, if you have many posts on the same days, the posts are sorted by the number of the comments received. In other words, if the posts are popular among the students' friends, they press the "like" button or they leave some messages, and then the post will remain on the top regardless of the importance of the post for student A or student B. The timeline is linear and the importance (or interest in and so on) of the post are decided not by the owner but by popularity.

4.3. The number of friends

The total number of the friends of Student A and Student B shown in Table 4 is quite large compared to other Japanese students. However, when compared to Filipino students, the number is not so large since they usually have more than 500 friends according to my informal interview conducted in February 2016. That is why the unique behavior of posting and tagging by some groups becomes influential without knowing the actual impacts on their Facebook friends. Of course, the impact will be both positive and negative; however, the persons who post might evaluate the posting more positively, while the persons who are tagged might evaluate that posting more negatively. This phenomenon must be investigated through future study.

5. Conclusion

Since this is preliminary research, it is too early to make any conclusions. However, from the interviews, it can be said that the motivation for using Facebook is to keep and maintain a relationship with international friends. Facebook is a very convenient SNS to keep a relationship with international friends loosely forever. That is helpful whenever the students need any comments, or it helps that they can get them from their Facebook friends wherever they live in the world.

In Japan, besides Facebook, Twitter and LINE are very popular, so they utilize the different function of these SNS to pursue their goals in the same fashion as student B. He uses LINE to contact Chinese students instead of expecting them to use Facebook. Among Korean and Chinese students who are interested in contacting Japanese friends, it often happens that they install LINE. If there a variety of

SNS and they are free of charge, then the user can choose without any hesitation based on convenience.

Regarding a picture and a movie, it is very easy to post to Facebook and share with friends. However, the pictures and the movies reveal privacy easily. The borderline of private and public is vague, especially among friends from different cultures (Aoki, 2014).

Because of the function of Facebook, a person cannot control everything as he wishes like timelines and tagging. It seems that the idea of a timeline, 1) the linear display, 2) the popularity of posts determined by "likes" and the comments received, and 3) the rapid changes of functions are based on the Western cultural value system. This might be useful to investigate by using the value orientation developed by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) in a future study in order to understand these phenomena.

Acknowledgement

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